COMMUNAL RAGE IN SECULAR INDIA

Foreword by Amartya Sen

RAFIQ ZAKARIA

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COMMUNAL RAGE IN SECULAR INDIA

Why did the torching of 58 *kar sevaks* in the Sabarmati Express at Godhra take place? It was undoubtedly the work of some demented persons, insensitive to its possible aftermath. Worse, how did genocide on such a brutal scale in most parts of Gujarat occur? And that too in a state which gave birth to Gandhi and nurtured him! People all over the world continue to wonder: Have human relations in a country known for its broad humanism fallen so low? Why is it that Hindus and Muslims who lived together for more than a thousand years in peace, have now begun to hate one another? Never before were women and children burnt and butchered in such a bestial manner. The miscreants, incited by communal Hindus belonging to different castes and sub-castes and cutting across the rich and the poor, unleashed such a terrible reign of murder, rape and loot that history itself stood aghast at what it was forced to record.

Dr. Rafiq Zakaria, a scholar of international repute, who has spent more than 50 years of his life trying to bring Hindus and Muslims together, delves deep into the past and present of the relationship between the two communities to discover what went wrong that brought about such conflagration of hatred and bloodshed. He also looks at the future with diffidence but hope.

Prof. Amartya Sen of Cambridge University, one of the greatest thinkers of our times, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for economics in 1998, has written the *Foreword* to the book. He warns that unless the communal virus which seems to have overtaken India in such a horrendous manifestation is not destroyed, it will destroy India itself.

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To the memory of

Y.B. Chavan

one of the great leaders of Free India, who upheld, without fear or favour, the cause of communal harmony against all odds, whether as Chief Minister of Maharashtra or as Union Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of India.

"When we say that Indian Muslims require to be Indianised, it means you presume that they are not Indian. And creating this type of feeling against a large minority of India is the greatest crime that can be committed in this country.
There may be individuals here and there, who are unpatriotic... There may be unpatriotic people among the Hindus also... May be there are some Muslims too who are unpatriotic. But are we going to take these exceptional cases and brand a whole community as unpatriotic and anti-national?"

— Y.B. Chavan as India's Home Minister, replying to the debate on communal riots in Ahmedabad in the Rajya Sabha on November 24, 1969.

Foreword

Professor Amartya Sen
Master of Trinity College,
Cambridge, U.K.
&
Nobel Laureate in Economics.

Alexander Pope has described how one can "die of nothing but a rage to live." That could be tragic enough, but nothing like the massive catastrophe when thousands die not of their own "rage to live," but of the "rage to kill" of genocidal brutes looking for an opportunity to slaughter. The Gujarat massacre, unrestrained by a state government that proved to be, at best, grossly incompetent but very likely a great deal worse, is a manifestation of vicious sectarian politics that is doing its best to turn India into a barbaric country of which every citizen has reason to be ashamed.

Shame, however, is not enough. First, shame alone will not stop slaughter, especially when one group kills while others are ashamed. To prevent any recurrence of similar carnage in the future (with or without the misfortune of being in a state ruled by Narendra Modi), we have to examine the causal processes that lead to such barbarities. Second, while massacre is the brutal end of the nastiness of communal politics, that

nastiness can – and does – take many other forms as well, making millions of people deeply insecure and threatening the very integrity of the nation itself. The Gujarat butchery is more than a communal slaughter; it reflects a diabolic beastliness that communal sectarians have planted well into India's body politic.

This reasoned and moving book by the highly respected Rafiq Zakaria is a powerful attempt at analyzing the communal peril that India faces which threatens the future of India as a secular democracy. Zakaria says, in the Preface, that he "could not help writing this book." I must confess we have reason to welcome Zakaria's helplessness. His writings have illuminated important parts of Indian politics for many decades, and his readers would like to know what this veteran analyst thinks of the recent events, and how he interprets the threats that India faces today and has to tackle tomorrow. The old readers of Zakaria, including this one, would also like to see how Zakaria's earlier thoughts respond to the new reality that has been unfolding. I am happy to be able to say that the readers will be richly rewarded by the cogency and force of this extremely timely book.

Zakaria presents, with much clarity, his diagnosis of what has changed in Indian sectarian politics. The earlier manifestation of what he calls "the communal phenomenon" was more among the Muslims than the Hindus, and it contributed — aided by the rage it generated — to the partition of India. This is, of course, only an over-rapid summary; there

is a fuller story, and readers of Rafiq Zakaria's earlier books would know how he analyzed the complex events leading to the partition, and his scrutiny of the respective roles of Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah in the politics of the day. But things have taken a very different turn since the partition, with Hindu communalism in ascendancy. In an earlier book, *The Widening Divide*, Zakaria has already diagnosed a growing alienation between the two communities. There has been a monotonic increase in the barrier between the two communities, decade by decade, and what had begun as a by-product of the British rule has now become a fixed and extensive feature of the politics of contemporary India.

The process has been fed by communal Hindu politics, fostering divisiveness ("indirectly aping Jinnah," as Zakaria sees it), combined with plentiful use of religious misinterpretations and historical distortions to alienate Hindus from their Muslim fellow citizens. Zakaria identifies the importance of countering the falsities on the basis of which the motivated alienation has been nurtured and cultivated. He scrutinizes these claims and accusations, and presents his well-considered response to each. This is part of what Zakaria sees has to be done now, but elsewhere in this wide-ranging book, he presents his advices and admonitions on more attitudinal issues. The book speaks to all, but Zakaria pays particular attention to addressing those groups which have an interest in reducing the alienation that endangers India. The overall object of the book is to reduce the power and

influence of "the divisive forces that threaten the secular character of our polity."

The contribution that this book makes can be put in three different baskets — each with importance of its own. First, the analysis of what is currently happening, seen in historical perspective, is itself a significant contribution, especially in the seasoned hands of Rafiq Zakaria.

Second, the particular arguments and counter-arguments that Zakaria presents illuminate the debates surrounding these issues, and I would particularly refer the reader to the chapters "Historical Distortions" and "Religious Misconceptions," and also the one called "Shivaji and Vivekananda" (where Zakaria shows that the thoughts of these great leaders were altogether different from those of the Hindu communalists who invoke them and who attribute to them ideologies that each would have found revolting).

Last but by no means least, Zakaria uses his well-established and well-deserved reputation to ask some questions that others too would have to address in their own ways. The book is, in this sense, also a constructive invitation to discuss and debate. I will take the liberty of raising two particular points I would like to add to what Zakaria himself says.

The first point concerns the identities and perspectives of those who belong to a community not in the sense of having (or attaching particular importance to) the corresponding

religious beliefs (whether Hindu or Muslim), but in the sense of genealogy and the sharing of some social practice. The counting of Hindus and Muslims in a census cannot but be different from a survey of religious beliefs. Confusions between the two are skilfully exploited by sectarian politicians, by taking genealogical identity to be the same as religious identity. Is this not a further issue to investigate, going beyond allegedly religion-based classifications, since the categories can be rather different?

Second, everyone has many identities, related not just to one's religion and community, but also to class, occupation, language, gender, political inclinations, and so on. Is there a danger that in seeing a person in terms of his or her religion, we can lose other aspects of the person's individuality? When I was growing up in Bengal in the bloody 1940s, I remember being struck — even as a child — by the fact that the victims of the riots overwhelmingly came from the same class, even when they belonged to different communities or religious groups. When a riot erupts, the thugs and the killers in each group try to slaughter the easiest targets in the "opposite" group: those who live in slums (not solid houses) and who have to go out to earn their meagre income (come what may). The class identity of the victims — whether Hindu or Muslim — was frequently much the same while their communal identities were divergent. Do we, then, need to supplement the kind of questions that Zakaria raises (his movingly written last chapter

is called "What Should Muslims Do?") by other questions that concentrate on other identities ("how should slum-dwellers resist?", "what can workers and working class organizations do?", "what should intellectuals try to achieve?", "what do the community of lawyers owe to the country?" and so on). Resisting the assumed primacy of categorization of people according to religious beliefs or communities can be a very important part of an anti-communalist strategy.

Among the important contributions that Rafiq Zakaria makes in this inspiring book is to invite us to address, in the best way we can, the gigantic threat that India faces. The one thing we cannot do is to do nothing. Zakaria's confession that he "could not help writing this book" also implores us all to address the terrible threat that India faces from communal politics. The monograph is the outcome, as Zakaria explains, of a "deep anguish" which he has gone through "as an Indian." That anguish cannot but be shared by us all. The book is a stirring call as well as an illuminating analysis. We have to respond to each.

Cambridge,
July 28, 2002.

Preface

I could not help writing this book; I was getting deeply concerned about the rising tide of the rage of a considerable section of communal Hindus against Muslims. This has taken the worst form in Gujarat. It has been a fallout of sectarian politics which is both a hangover of the British rule and the consequence of Partition. Earlier it was a menace but now it threatens to be a weapon of extermination of a minority. Its earlier outburst was more among Muslims than Hindus; it brought about, to start with, a kind of alienation of the Muslims from the Hindus. Later, by the forties of the last century, this developed into a rage of Muslims against the Hindus. The communalism of Hindus was then not as virulent. Gandhi was able to contain it; it surfaced now and then but remained by and large ineffective. However after Partition this gained strength and succeeded in widening the divide between the two communities. I have dealt with the alienation in my book: *The Widening Divide*, published by Penguin India. I have analysed the causes of the distrust between Hindus and Muslims. In this book I have relied heavily on my earlier research for the relevant material.

My personal experience has also influenced my thinking; all through my public life, extending over sixty years, I have worked hard to fight Muslim communalism and to better Hindu-Muslim relations. At the instance of my mentor, Y.B. Chavan, I formed the Indian Unity Centre to further the cause. I devoted considerable time to it and worked for it in many ways taking advantage of the various positions I was privileged to hold. The All-India Khilafat Committee, with its hoary past, of which I have been chairman for over 20 years, has now become a vehicle of communal harmony. I have struggled to establish this and all the other organizations I run, as centres of national integration. But with every decade, I notice the barriers between the two communities becoming more and more impregnable and of late it has been increasingly difficult to penetrate these.

Communalism both in its Hindu and Muslim garb is really a product of the British rule; the new rulers, with their colonial outlook, sowed the seed slowly and gradually. The two communities drifted apart; this, in turn, proved beneficial to the rulers in administering the country; they implemented, in their characteristically subtle way, the time-tested policy of "divide and rule". The ugly outcome of it was the recurrence of riots which prevented the building of "the union of hearts", to quote Gandhiji's words, between the two communities.

As time passed, the British introduced the game of power politics by doling out to Indians a measure of administrative responsibilities; this added to the rivalry between the leaders

of the two communities, each wanting more of it. The British played the role of an empire and managed to put one against the other. Then came the Mahatma who upset their applecart. His revolt changed the situation; but the animosity between the Hindus and the Muslims continued. This was however confined to the table; there was no breaking of heads in the streets.

In fact until 1937 Muslim politics was in the doldrums; Jinnah gave it an aggressive form after he discarded his nationalist past and mobilized the Muslims to fight the Hindus. He used every device, including the Two-Nation theory, to keep the two apart. He frustrated every move towards fraternization and in the last stage, even called upon the Muslims to fight it out in the streets but his move for the so-called "Direct Action" in 1946 turned out to be a fiasco. The constitutionalist in Jinnah had lost his balance. He asked for blood which resulted in the death of five thousand Hindus and Muslims; but it failed to achieve its purpose as in the holocaust, which Jinnah had ordered, more Muslims were killed than Hindus, as disclosed by Sardar Patel who was then the Central Home Minister. In retaliation the Hindus in Bihar massacred ten times more Muslims. For the first time the Hindus showed that they were not cowards. They could be more brutal than the Muslims.

Jinnah gave to Muslim communalism the name of nationalism; it was based on religion. Hindus had opposed

such a concept during the freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhi; but after Partition the communal Hindus heartily adopted it. Their communalism has since become as much religion-based as Muslim communalism. Before 1947, the rage had gripped the communal Muslims in the name of Islamic nationalism; now the communal Hindus have taken to it and use it against the Muslims in the name of Hindu nationalism; its worst exhibition has been the gruesome massacre of the innocent and hapless Muslims in Gujarat.

There is a difference, however, in the rage of the Muslims which Jinnah had generated by his call of "Direct Action" in Calcutta and the rage of communal Hindus as let loose by them in Gujarat. In Calcutta there was a Hindu-Muslim riot; in Ahmedabad, Vadodara and other places there was a one-sided slaughter of the Muslims. Jinnah had at first thought that in a hand-to-hand fight with knives and sticks Muslims would have the better of the Hindus; after the Calcutta massacre, he found that his calculation was wrong; in a civil war, which he often threatened, the Hindus would be able to beat the Muslims. He therefore gave up threatening civil war and put all his eggs in the British basket; without their support he would not realize his dream of Pakistan. He worked hard to win over the British to his side; Churchill gave him full support. Mountbatten came to his rescue but he could give him only a truncated homeland; he told Jinnah that was the best the British could do for him. Nehru and Patel committed the

greatest blunder in agreeing to Partition, much against the wishes of the Mahatma; the aftermath was so horrendous that the two leaders later publicly regretted their decision.

After obtaining Pakistan, Jinnah was most distressed about the loss of Kashmir which acceded to India; he sent tribals to take the valley but they were thrown out. After his death his successors tried to get it through the United Nations but having failed, they waged two wars against India in which they were badly trounced. So Pakistan has now decided on the obnoxious method of sending suicide squads in the form of the so-called jihadis, to annex Kashmir. These jihadis kill innocent persons and in the process often get themselves killed too. They are indoctrinated by their mentors with the belief that by dying they would be martyrs which would assure them a place in heaven. They bring bombs and blow up not only men but also women and children. They exploit the name of Islam to commit these heinous crimes; they kill mostly Hindus; this fuels the Hindus' hatred against Indian Muslims.

Partition broke my heart; I had opposed Jinnah's Two-Nation theory and told Muslims that by following it they would be ruined. They did not heed it; the miseries that they are undergoing in South Asia today is of their own making. The Hindus remained steadfast and refused to turn India into a Hindu rashtra. They adopted secularism as their state policy which although a western innovation, has its roots in the teachings of the Upanishads, the Buddha and Asoka. After

Independence Nehru pursued it with vigour; but the hatred that Partition had instilled in the hearts of Hindus against Muslims worked against its proper implementation. They felt it benefited more the Muslims than the Hindus. They characterized it as pseudo-secularism which appeased the Muslims. As for the leaders of the Muslims, they raised non-issues, fomenting religious controversies which had little to do with the welfare of their co-religionists; these unfortunately brought them into conflict with the Hindus and added to the ill-will between the two communities. It also angered the communal Hindus who felt that even freedom had not given them the hegemony to which they were entitled. They felt that the Muslims who remained in India had become an obstacle in the way of India's progress and a threat to the cultural dominance of Hinduism.

Nirad Chaudhuri has rightly observed: "After 1947 there has been a tendency to consolidate communities along religious lines; both Hindus and Muslims did not find anything wrong in their efforts towards religious consolidation. Religious rigidities were over-stressed by the respective elite of the two communities even cutting across the pressures of development of science and technology in the country. The elite on both sides have made use of religion for securing political and economic ends." In the result Muslim communalists gained nothing, while the Hindu communalists became aggressively hostile to the Muslims. The tables were turned.

Coming to what happened in Godhra, no one can excuse the torching of the Hindus in the ill-fated Sabarmati Express; it appears to have been the work of some illiterate Muslim goons who had nothing to do with Islam. But for their crime, innocent Muslims in different parts of Gujarat were massacred; this shows how religion in India, to use the words of the noted sociologist, Conor O' Brien "combines combustibility with nationalism to fuel political murder". Strangely the barbarism which took such a beastly form was committed by Gandhi's own people; they turned their face against all that he had taught them. The brute in them was roused and surprisingly it was religion which brought it to the fore.

The more I think about it the more I am distressed; I have done enough to expose Muslim communalism; I thought the time has now come to explore the nature of Hindu communalism, especially the violent form that it has lately assumed. I am still unable to understand why Gujarat erupted in the manner it did. Is it just an aberration or a warning about the shape of things to come? Are the rest of the Hindus likely to take to the same path, believing that it will ensure a more prosperous future for them?

I have tried to be objective in my assessment of what I call the rage of an influential section of communal Hindus. I have avoided any reference to politics and politicians as well as to persons and organizations who occupy the centre stage in the communal arena. In the first four chapters which pertain to the current events I have refrained from giving my own reaction

and appraisal to what happened in Godhra and thereafter in the rest of Gujarat. I have given the reports and views of some of the most distinguished writers and intellectuals, mostly Hindus, and that too in their own words; none of them is a protagonist of one school or the other. I have quoted them at length even at the cost of being accused of indulging in a cut-and-paste presentation; they have put their arguments so cogently and candidly that I felt I could not have done better; I thought readers deserve the best material available.

In the subsequent chapters I have discussed both the grievances of Hindus against Muslims and the religious misrepresentations and historical distortions pertaining to Islam and the Muslims which have been used as cannon fodder by communal Hindus in their tirade against Muslims. I have also delineated the essential features of the lives of three magnificent apostles of communal harmony who have been wrongly presented by the votaries of Hindu communalism as the promoters of Hindu revivalism. In the last chapter I have dealt with what Muslims should do to better their relations with Hindus. However what has intrigued some of the best minds is why have Hindu-Muslim relations worsened to this extent? I am firmly of the opinion that Partition is the main cause. And so long as it remains intact I feel there is little hope of any substantial improvement. In fact the old historical baggage is resurrected because of Partition and the communal virus that was spread by the propagation of Jinnah's Two-Nation theory has been revived once again and given a more aggressive form.

It is Muslims who asked for Partition and the irony of it is that it is they who became its worst sufferers. It has not only done the greatest damage to India's security but has shattered all the traditional ties which had bound Muslims of the subcontinent together. Politically they have indeed lost heavily but even culturally their loss has been colossal. Families have been separated; their contact with one another has been dismally disrupted; their language, Urdu, has been more or less destroyed; the community on the whole has been uprooted. Above all, their security has been endangered. Their weakened position has strengthened the anti-Muslim communal forces among the Hindus who now have a convenient handle to harass and harm them. Had it not been for the secular temper of a large number of Hindus and the broad humanism which is the kernel of Hinduism, the extermination of Indian Muslims would have been easily carried out. Though there was a genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, it must be admitted that the rest of India reacted unequivocally against it. And that is what has saved the Muslims.

However if the jihadis continue with their suicidal operations and Pakistan refuses to give up its anti-Hindu stance then as General Musharraf himself told the Pakistanis, the fate of Indian Muslims will be jeopardized. Those who believe that the rest of the Muslim world will be bothered about them are grossly mistaken; each of the fifty Muslim

countries is so mired in its own problems that it has no time for others. Pan-Islamism was a myth; it has never worked in practice.

The Milli Gazette has rightly observed: "Indian Muslims, who have been in the forefront of supporting pan-Islamic causes for a century, will have to take stock of their situation. They need to rethink their priorities and devise ways to save them while leading their lives as principled and law-abiding citizens. Gujarat should be a watershed for the community and the country. Enough should be enough." Indian Muslims must be realistic and carve out their own future in such a way that they can live in peace and harmony with the Hindus. There are still enough Hindus who would be only too willing to give them a helping hand. Muslims must grasp it. My book is an attempt to take Hindu-Muslim relations in that direction.

I hope my sincere and humble effort to remove the cobwebs, which have bedevilled Hindu-Muslim relations, will help bring back the India of Tagore's dream which he has so beautifully expressed in his poem:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments
By narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way
Into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by Thee
Into ever-widening thought and action;
Into that heaven of freedom,
My Father, let my country awake.

All I can say is that this book is the outcome of the deep anguish which I as an Indian Muslim have gone through; it is not written in the spirit of denouncing the communal Hindus but to convince them that their rage against Muslims is misplaced. It is also to impress upon Muslims that they must introspect and reorient their attitude towards the Hindus with a view to rebuild the bridges between the two communities.

Some of my Hindu friends, whose opinion I value, have objected to my over-emphasis on the rage of the communal Hindus which they say has gripped only a fraction of the community. Others, however, have warned me that the communal virus has infected a much larger cross-section of Hindus, in particular the middle class who now openly speak and work against Muslims; they feel they have had enough of the Muslims who have nothing in common with them and are more obsessed with their religion than their country. These Hindus regret that Partition has remained incomplete. They feel it should have included the transfer of the entire population. I sincerely hope the large majority of Hindus does not subscribe to this view. The day that happens, chaos will overtake India.

A horrifying suggestion was made by a bigoted Hindu leader to M.J. Akbar, editor-in-chief of *The Asian Age*. He said:

"the best solution to the Muslim problem in the subcontinent is to line up every Indian Muslim on the border with Pakistan, and then start a war: the Indian Army could finish Pakistan while Pakistan would finish India's Muslims." Akbar took it as a joke; but that showed the depth of hatred some Hindus bear in their hearts against Muslims.

In his farewell address, K.R. Narayanan, the outgoing President of India, made a special appeal to Hindus who are the majority community to "speak out in the traditional spirit of the Hindu religion. My parting appeal to you is to guard our tradition of tolerance, for, that is the soul of our culture and civilization, that is the spirit of our Constitution, and that is also the secret of the successful working of our democracy and the secret of the coherence of this vast country as a united nation." He drew the nation's attention to what Jawaharlal Nehru had told the chief ministers soon after Partition: "We have a Muslim minority who are so large in numbers that they cannot, even if they want to, go anywhere else. They have got to live in India. That is a basic fact about which there can be no argument. Whatever the provocation from Pakistan and whatever the indignities and horrors inflicted on non-Muslims there, we have got to deal with this minority in a civilized manner. We must give them security and the rights of citizens in a democratic state. If we fail to do so, we shall have a festering sore which will eventually poison the whole body politic and probably destroy it."

Prof. Amartya Sen of Cambridge University is one of the most outstanding thinkers of our times. He has distinguished himself as an economist with a difference. As Dr. Bhalchandra Mungekar, Vice-Chancellor of Mumbai University said in his citation, while the degree of doctor of laws was being conferred on Prof. Sen by the Mumbai University, that the eminent professor rose above the normal views, strands, and ideologies and gave a new turn to economics. He showed how it could be used as a successful tool "to secure enhancement of the quality of human life". In this Prof. Sen's contribution has been unique and he is admired the world over for presenting a new path for achieving the welfare of the poor and the oppressed. In 1998 he was honoured with the Nobel Prize in Economics, mainly due to his contributions to development and welfare economics, with special emphasis on poverty elevation. My wife Fatma and I spoke to him in Cambridge and sent him the manuscript of the book. He liked my approach to the problem of Hindu-Muslim relations and the analysis of the recent gruesome happenings in our country. He is worried about the fear that these have generated in the minority. His *Foreword* expresses his deep anguish and sincere concern about the future of our secular polity. I am deeply indebted to him for the *Foreword* and for his kind words about me.

Fatma has mastered the art of editorship. She managed with distinction her editorial assignments first in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* and later in *The Times of India* for over two decades. She now edits *The Taj Magazine*. All my books have

been scrutinized by her penetrating eye; each has benefited enormously as she reconstructed my thoughts and polished my presentation. This book has had the same advantage; I am indeed fortunate in having her as a companion who is a tower of perfection.

I am grateful to Harsha Bhatkal, my publisher, for the interest he took in my book and to his associate Uma Prabhu, an experienced and able journalist, for her constant involvement in the various aspects of the publication as also her enterprising colleague Swapna Shinde. I wish to thank my personal assistant M.V. Raghavan for typing and retyping my manuscript over and over again and for designing the book and the cover along with the graphic artist of *The Taj Magazine* Sanjay Patil. I also thank my secretary Durraiya (Netra) Khokhar for proof reading the manuscript painstakingly. Shabbir Muchhala took a personal interest in overseeing the work of printing the book at his first-rate press, in record time. I am thankful to him.

Mumbai,
August 15, 2002.

Rafiq Zakaria

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1

Godhra Massacre

Charles Dickens, one of the greatest novelists of all times, begins his immortal classic, *A Tale of Two Cities* thus: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way..."[1]

For those of us who, even after what has happened in Gujarat, still believe in Hindu-Muslim unity, these have been the worst of times, the age of foolishness, the epoch of incredulity, the season of darkness, the winter of despair; instead of going to heaven, these happenings threatened to take us straight to hell. Godhra and its aftermath in the rest of Gujarat are the worst blots on India's face admitted Prime

Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee. They took the most bestial form known to our history. What is shocking is that these gruesome happenings took place in a state which had given birth to Gandhi, brought him up and nurtured him for the best part of his early public life, when he gave the message of non-violence, not only to his people but also to the rest of the human race.

The place where the first incident occurred is Godhra, a small town in Panchmahal district of Gujarat. It is about 150 kilometres from Ahmedabad. It has a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims of over two lakhs. Since Independence it witnessed several communal riots: the earliest was in 1948 when over a hundred persons were killed. Thereafter peace prevailed between the two communities for twenty six years until 1968. Then it was shattered once again. There was no communal disturbance thereafter for another fifteen years. In 1980 a fierce clash erupted between Hindus and Muslims. Again in 1990 and then in 1992 riots took place in the town. And finally came the gruesome torching of Hindus on that eerie day in February 2002. The town has therefore always been prone to communal riots and it is really surprising that the authorities, despite rumours of verbal clashes for weeks between the two communal groups, failed to take any precautionary measures. It seems they were completely in the dark about what went on around them.

The culprits of the Godhra carnage were allegedly Muslims, belonging to a sect known as the Ghanchis who live by

crushing oil seeds. They bear Muslim names but are illiterate and absolutely ignorant of the teachings of Islam; they allegedly acted in the most inhuman manner, torching the families of the *kar sevaks* — men, women and children — who were travelling in the ill-fated Sabarmati Express; within minutes the whole bogie was burnt down, reducing to ashes all the inmates and their belongings.

It presented a ghastly sight and those who witnessed it felt not only deep pain and anguish but seething anger against the perpetrators of such a gruesome act. Since they were Muslims, the incident took a communal turn instantly. As soon as the news spread, Hindus came out in the streets in different parts of Gujarat and in all their fury targeted innocent and helpless Muslims who had nothing to do with what the Ghanchis had allegedly done in Godhra; they were brutalized by miscreants who were let loose; their women were mercilessly raped and men, women and children were burnt alive. It was the unkindest travesty of justice.

Surprisingly, even Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who has been the secular oasis in the Hindutva's communal desert, came out in his speech in Goa with the question: "Who lit the fire?" Instead of going for the perpetrators and punishing them, why were the innocent and helpless Muslims punished; what was their crime? Those who lit the fire should have been targeted but they are yet to be detected. What was shocking was the brutal manner in which the retaliation was connived at by the police and in some cases, even witnessed by them

without lifting a finger to stop it. Worse, they hardly did anything to find out the culprits and investigate how and why they committed the horrendous act at Godhra.

Different versions of its occurrence have appeared in the press and on the electronic media. At one time it was officially stated that it was a terrorist attack, pre-planned by the ISI of Pakistan. An objective account, after intensive questioning of officials and witnesses is provided by Rajiv Chandrasekaran, the correspondent of *Washington Post*: "For two days, as the Sabarmati Express sneaked across northern India, some Hindu activists in cars S-5 and S-6 carried on like hooligans. They exposed themselves to other passengers. They pulled headscarves off Muslim women. They evicted a family of four in the middle of the night for refusing to join in chants glorifying the Hindu god Ram. They failed to pay for the tea and snacks they consumed at each shop.

"When the train pulled into this hardscrabble town in western India on the morning of February 27, the reputation of its rowdiest passengers preceded it. When they refused to pay for their food, Muslim boys among the vendors at Godhra station stormed the train. Interviews with passengers on the train, witnesses to the incident and police and railway officials suggest that the train fire was not a premeditated ambush by young Muslims, but a spontaneous reaction, provoked by Hindu activists, that went out of control. 'Both sides were at fault', said a police official here, who spoke on condition of anonymity. 'The provocation was there and the reaction was strong. But no one had imagined this would turn into such a big tragedy'."[2]

Mainstream, the leftist weekly founded by Nikhil Chakravartty , has given a different version of an eye-witness to the whole Godhra incident; it reads as follows: "The actual story didn't start at Godhra as is being told everywhere but it started from Daahod, 75 kilometres before the Godhra railway station. At about 5.30 to 6.00 a.m. the train reached Daahod railway station. These *kar sevaks*, after having tea and snacks at the railway stall, broke down the stall following some argument with the stall owner and they proceeded back to the departing train. The stall owner then filed an NC against the *kar sevaks* at the local police station about the above incident. At about 7.00 or 7.15 a.m. the train reached the Godhra railway station. All the *kar sevaks* came out from their reserved compartments and started to have tea and snacks at the small tea stall on the platform which was being run by an old bearded man from the minority community. There was a servant helping the old man in the stall. The *kar sevaks* on purpose argued with the old man and then beat him up and pulled his beard. This was all planned to humiliate the old man since he was from the minority community. The *kar sevaks* kept repeating the slogan, '*Mandir ka nirmaan karo, Babur ki aulad ko bahar karo*' (Start building the Mandir and throw the sons of Babur – that is, Muslims – out of the country)."[3]

This is what eyewitnesses narrated to the correspondent: Thereafter, they said, the situation took a turn for the worse. The sixteen year old daughter of the old man who was also present at the station came forward and tried to save her father

from the *kar sevaks*. She kept pleading with them to stop beating her father and to leave him alone. But instead of listening to her pleadings, the *kar sevaks* lifted the young girl and took her inside their compartment (S-6) and closed the compartment door. The train started to move out of the platform of the Godhra railway station. The old man kept banging on the compartment and begged the *kar sevaks* to let go of his daughter.

An eyewitness recounted: "Just before the train could move out from the platform, two stall vendors jumped into the last bogie that comes after the guard's cabin. And with the intention of saving the girl they pulled the chain and stopped the train. By the time the train halted completely, it was one kilometre away from the railway station. The two men then came to the bogie in which the girl was and started banging the door, requesting the *kar sevaks* to let go of the girl. As a result of the commotion, people in the vicinity near the tracks started moving towards the train. The boys and the mob (which included women) had by then gathered near the compartment. They requested the *kar sevaks* to return the girl to her father. But they did not agree; instead they shut the windows of the bogie. This infuriated the mob and they retaliated by pelting stones at the compartment."[4]

Continuing his report, the correspondent wrote: "The compartments adjoining compartment S-6 on either side had *kar sevaks*, carrying banners that had long bamboo sticks attached to them. The *kar sevaks* got down and started

attacking with those bamboo sticks; a mob gathered to save the girl. This further angered the crowd; they brought diesel and petrol from trucks and rickshaws standing at the garages in Signal Falia (a place in Godhra) and burnt the compartment. In retaliation the *kar sevaks* in the other compartments got down and started burning down the garages in Signal Falia including Badshah Masjid at Shehra Bhagaad..."[5] There was no mention of the fate of the girl; apparently she was also torched along with all the passengers who included women and children.

Prem Shankar Jha in his column in the prestigious magazine *Outlook* wrote that it must have been a planned affair: "It is barely possible that the dispute arose out of a fracas between *kar sevaks* and Muslim vendors in Vadodara, or on the train. The VHP and Bajrang Dal are not exactly known for their sensitivity to the sentiments of the minority community and may have cast aspersions on Islam that brought forth this unwonted, although still utterly condemnable reaction. However, if the reaction had been spontaneous, it would almost certainly have taken several hours to gather force and would have taken place in Vadodara and not 150 kms away. Even the theory floating around that the persons who had been roughed up in Vadodara rang up co-religionists in Godhra and set off the conflagration sounds far-fetched, for the attack on the train was too well organized and too cold-blooded to have been organized in the two hours or so that the train took to get there. Thus one cannot rule out the possibility that

the attack was planned, was intended to occur after the Ayodhya meeting of VHP *kar sevaks*, and was instigated by outside elements."[6]

According to Azam Shahab, who interviewed several eye-witnesses in Godhra for the Urdu daily *Hindustan* of Mumbai, he did not find a shred of evidence to justify the theory that the scorching of the men, women and children in the Sabarmati Express was a planned affair. He said that when news spread like wild fire of a Muslim girl having been kidnapped by the *kar sevaks* and detained in the bogie of the said train, which some miscreants had burnt, the locals in their hundreds rushed to see what was happening; some of them, in fact, tried to put off the fire. None of them, he said, brought any petrol bombs or lathis with them. It was just a natural reaction of people, who ran to witness the sordid affair. This has been confirmed, according to Shahab, by the report of the railway police, submitted to the authorities on April 15, 2002. Azam has also asked in his despatches as to why would Muslims, as alleged, burn bogie no.6, which only contained fifteen *kar sevaks* and not the other bogies, which had hundreds of *kar sevaks* in them? If it was done to rescue the kidnapped girl, it would be the height of madness on their part, to burn the bogie, when the girl detained by the *kar sevaks* was in that bogie?[7]

Until now there is no confirmation of any single version by the authorities. This is not to justify the burning of the train or the scorching of the innocent men, women and

children in Godhra; whatever the provocation, the culprits were brutes and those who joined them in this heinous crime deserve the maximum punishment. As Muslims, according to the Quran, in the life hereafter, they would burn in fire forever. All the same, people are entitled to know how all this took place. Some arrests have been made; some have also been charge-sheeted; but the real version has not been made public as yet. That is indeed intriguing; it is not enough to condemn the crime or arrest a few suspects; but in the larger interest of restoring peace and communal harmony it was imperative on the part of the authorities to get at the truth with all its ramifications? In fact the truth should have been instantly found out and told without the slightest delay; had this been done, the carnage that followed could have been contained to a large extent. The delay caused the fire to be lit which engulfed the rest of Gujarat in it. And now to give a routine reply that the judge, appointed to investigate, will look into it, can hardly help restore the confidence of the people. They know it will take years for the judge to submit his report.

The National Human Rights Commission had recommended that the investigation should be entrusted, without any loss of time, to the CBI; unfortunately this was not done. The entire probe was carried out in the usual slipshod manner. Jyoti Punwani, an experienced and highly respected investigating reporter revealed a confounding picture of "the callous and careless way in which it was carried out by the local police" and how the state was deliberately downplaying

the whole incident. She wrote that the police stopped the train at 9.30 pm and the bogie was burnt between 7.20 and 8.30 pm. This was the First Information Report. But the documents filed by the police before the courts gives the time as the night of February 27. In the driver's complaint it was mentioned that some persons were arrested on the spot. However the remand application of the first 30 people to be arrested was made much before at 21.30 hours (9.30 pm), February 27.

Punwani points out: "This is only the most glaring of contradictions in the case papers of this crime, which sparked off the Gujarat violence and which is described as a deep-rooted all-India conspiracy. There are two offences registered about the train incident. The first, CR 9/2002, names unknown accused and deals with the entire incident from the time the train arrived at Godhra station. The complainant here is the driver. The second, CR 10/2002, is based on a complaint filed by sub-inspector Jhala of the Gujarat Railway Police. It pertains to offences that allegedly took place at the railway station after the Sabarmati Express was burnt." On that basis eleven Muslims were arrested and the complaint against them by Jhala forms part of their remand application.

Punwani is however intrigued by this development. She states: "The complaint tells a hitherto untold story. More importantly, the facts in it do not tally with those in CR 9/2002. Jhala's complaint says that after the burning of the Sabarmati Express, the local police and the railway police

rounded up 15 people. While the police were interrogating them, at around 11 a.m., a mob of 3,000 armed with kerosene and lethal weapons tried to snatch the 15 people from the police and began pelting stones at them. The complaint says the mob tried to murder passengers and set fire to the other bogies of the Sabarmati Express. The police dispersed them by a lathi-charge, tear gas and finally firing, in which one person, who was carrying a sword, was injured. This complaint was filed at 23.40 hours (11.40 p.m.), February 27, 11 hours after the offence. The railway police station is at Godhra railway station itself."[8]

There is no information about the 15 people who were arrested on the spot. Who were they? Where were they interrogated? Were they the same as accused numbers 1 to 15 in CR 9/2002, who were also arrested on the spot for burning the train? But their arrests took place at 21.30 hours. However in the complaint neither any policeman nor a passenger was shown to have been injured. And though Section 436 of the Indian Penal Code had been applied to them which deals with burning homes, Jhala's complaint did not mention any such attempt.

Punwani asks further questions: "Who pulled the chain which led to the train stopping outside Signal Falia? The driver of the train has, in his complaint, stated that the residents of Signal Falia did so. This implies that some of the Muslims of Signal Falia entered the train and pulled the chain, while others outside stoned and then burnt the coach. It is worth noting that the second chain-pulling has been traced to S-6, the very

coach that was burnt. Strangely, the driver has failed to give any description of those who made up or at least led the mob at Signal Falia -- neither their age, sex, nor physical appearance..."[9]

Punwani then reports what happened in the court: "Some of the first 15 accused have stated in court, when their remand was being asked for, that they were picked up from their homes or workplaces. The office record of Inayat Jhujhara (57), a government servant and one of the accused, shows him to have been at work on the morning of February 27 from 9 am to 12.30 pm. This means, according to the police, he burnt the coach early in the morning and then went to work. Jhujhara, due to retire soon, was suspended from his job on March 15."[10] This also does not make much sense. Punwani further reveals that according to Godhra's senior police officers the combing operations began only on the evening of February 27, after the chief minister visited Godhra. If the case papers of this crucial offence are so full of loopholes, it is hardly surprising that those of CR 66/2002, relating to the violence which took place in the town after the Sabarmati Express incident, are even more questionable. Punwani probes the matter further and discloses:

"The most important anomaly here is that the four main accused in this offence are the same four persons accused of burning the bogie of the Sabarmati Express: President of the Godhra Municipality Abdul Rahim Kalota, and corporators Haji Bilal, Salim Shaikh and Abdul Rahman Dhantiya alias

Kaankatta. This offence covers four different incidents of rioting and of damage done in four different areas. But only Muslim properties were damaged and burnt. This means, according to the police, after leading the mob which burnt the train, Kalota, Bilal and Co went on to lead four mobs which fought the Hindus at one spot, and damaged properties belonging to their own community in three different areas of Godhra. These three are all Hindu areas, in which showrooms and shops owned by Muslims, a mosque and a Muslim school, were damaged and burnt. In this CR, Farooqbhai Kasimani, whose shop and godown were looted and burnt, has been made an accused in an offence regarding the looting of his own shop!"[11] Punwani's meticulous report, which is based on minute details, shows that there was no seriousness on the part of the police while handling such a terrible affair, what shook not only the whole of Gujarat but also India. Had it been handled more competently and with utmost urgency it might have changed the course of events in Gujarat, which brought such bad name to the administration.

Praful Bidwai, the noted columnist, wrote in *Frontline*: "Reconstruction of the Godhra incident, for example in the Citizens' Forum report, suggests that it was a spontaneous, rather than an elaborately planned, over-reaction to the daily harassment of local Ghanchi Muslims (oil-pressers by occupation) by communally charged *kar sevaks* returning from Ayodhya. Had there been serious preparation for the attack on the Sabarmati Express, scheduled to reach Godhra at 2.55

a.m. there would have been a large crowd on the railway platform at dawn. There was not. When the train rolled in five hours late, there were only a handful of vendors, porters and passengers on the platform. An altercation broke out between the *kar sevaks* and Muslim tea vendors. It was only when a rumour spread that young Sophia Khan had been dragged into coach S-6 that a crowd gathered near Signal Falia, a basti known for communal tension and criminal activities. Seven weeks on, the government has failed to provide credible evidence linking the Godhra episode to a 'conspiracy' involving Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence or even an organized group in Gujarat or elsewhere. Nor can it explain why towns such as Ratlam, which are physically far closer to Godhra, and which have a similar composition of Hindus, Muslims and Adivasis, did not register any 'retaliatory' violence, while distant Ahmedabad did."[12]

Vir Sanghvi, the young and erudite editor of *Hindustan Times* is scathing in his attack on the secularists, especially in the media, who are fond of blaming the Hindus and exonerating the Muslims, even if the latter are the guilty ones. He wrote: "Even if you dispute the version of some of the *kar sevaks* – that the attack was premeditated and that the mob was ready and waiting – there can be no denying that what happened was indefensible, unforgivable and impossible to explain away as a consequence of great provocation. And yet, this is precisely how the secular establishment has reacted... This time, however, there has been no real provocation at all... And

yet, the sub-text to all secular commentary is the same: the *kar sevaks* had it coming to them. Basically, they condemn the crime; but blame the victims. Try and take the incident out of the secular construct that we, in India, have perfected and see how bizarre such an attitude sounds in other contexts... Why then are these poor *kar sevaks* an exception? Why have we de-humanized them to the extent that we don't even see the incident as the human tragedy that it undoubtedly was and treat it as just another consequence of the VHP's fundamentalist policies? The answer, I suspect, is that we are programmed to see Hindu-Muslim relations in simplistic terms: Hindus provoke, Muslims suffer."[13]

Too many questions have been raised by several important citizens anxious to know the truth but until now there has been no coherent and satisfactory answers; rumours still float and these are causing all the damage to the stability and security of the state. Moreover as the reaction to the Godhra incident throughout Gujarat was almost spontaneous and sudden, it took a much more savage form with the result that the torching of the men, women and children in Godhra was sidetracked. And as the victims in Gujarat were Muslims while in Godhra they were Hindus, a nasty communal colour was given by certain interested parties to their respective suffering as if Hindu lives were less precious than Muslim lives or vice versa. A most odious and unfortunate comparison which did enormous damage to communal harmony; it distorted the sense of horror, at both the happenings; each should have been

simultaneously condemned and the suffering of the victims equally mourned, irrespective of the number, the degree or the enormity of the crime.

Four months after the incident the Gujarat Forensic Science Laboratory has submitted its report; but it has taken the matter no further, even after some MPs asked the Government for the truth. In fact the report has given rise once again to several contradictory versions, with the result that it has almost opened a Pandora's box. Shankersinh Vaghela, the former Chief Minister of Gujarat, finds in the report enough proof that the burning of coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express was done by the miscreants of the VHP to fuel the fire of massacre of the Muslims throughout Gujarat; but the other side feels that the report provides enough material to show that it was a planned operation by some of the Muslim fanatics who were supported by the local population. *Frontline*, the influential fortnightly of the Hindu group of newspapers, after analyzing the evidence as produced by the Gujarat Forensic Science Laboratory has stated:

"Regardless of what methods are used, how much evidence is gathered or how quickly the investigation is wrapped up, whether the truth about the burning of the Sabarmati Express will ever be known is another story. Powerful Hindutva leaders had already written the script on the day of the tragedy itself."[14] Mohan Guruswamy goes to the extent of observing in *The Asian Age* that "File photographs of the burning coach very clearly show the flames raging from within, without even the

external paintwork being touched. The pictures also show rescuers trying to hose down the flames standing right alongside the burning coach. Obviously the coach was set afire from within and whosoever still insists that it was set afire from outside by the incensed mob is lying through the teeth."[15] Only the courts can decide who did what; until then speculation continues to hold the fort with charges and counter charges flung against one another.

Our popular and highly respected weekly, *India Today* summed up realistically the so-called "action and reaction" phenomenon proclaimed by the Chief Minister of Gujarat thus: "First it was Godhra Junction, for so long a railway station inconspicuous, ordinary, dirty, and then one extraordinary morning, one compartment of the Sabarmati Express became a moving inferno, and in the iron cage flesh and metal burned, and the religion of the 57 dead was Hindu. A few hours later, in distant Ahmedabad, fury, armed and hungry, the now famous reaction, rode on the wings of fire, and the religion of which was Hindu, and the killed and orphaned, in hundreds, were Muslims, and the burned shops and houses were the Muslims'. Both Godhra and Ahmedabad have travelled quite a distance in death and remembrance since then." And it has resulted, to quote the journal, in Muslims languishing "in the ghettos of fear as the unrepentant Hindu invents new phantoms."[16]

2

Gujarat Genocide

There was an instant wave of fury unleashed by certain Hindu communal elements as soon as the news of the scorching of 58 *kar sevaks* in the Sabarmati Express at Godhra was disseminated giving rise to an ugly mood of frenzied revenge and retaliation; it took the most inhuman form of violence and covered several cities and villages of Gujarat. There was not only complete collapse of law and order but, according to independent observers, it was aided and abetted by police officers and ministers of the State Government and even the elite which instantly resulted in the massacre of innocent Muslims and the burning of women and children, chopping a number of them into pieces, raping not only young girls but also married women and widows. There was also large scale destruction of property, including the razing of hundreds of mosques and dargahs. The electronic media showed the horrible scenes of brutality on the screen and

newspapers splashed the appalling happenings in sordid detail on their front pages.

How could this have happened in Gujarat which used to be moved by the songs of Narsingh Mehta? The question disturbs the minds of several concerned Indians. In the moving words of Shree Shankar Sharan, a social activist, "Gujarat was a land of peace, of growing prosperity of traders and migrants to far-off lands, regardless of differences of faith and life-style, of pioneers in science and technology, yet a culture rooted in the indigenous tradition, the birthplace of Narsingh Mehta who gave us the eternal and inspiring song "*Vaishnav Jana tau teney kahiye, je peer paraayi jaane re...*" which defined a Hindu as one who empathizes with the pain of others. Yet Gujarat exploded into an orgy of violence, brutality, mass murder, bizarre violence against women and children from February 27/28, 2002."[1]

I am told that for over a decade the Hindus of Gujarat have been systematically taught to hate Muslims and exterminate them if possible. To kill them whenever an opportunity came by or to boycott them socially and uproot them economically. Arundhati Roy, internationally renowned Booker Prize winner, who has been a doughty champion of the oppressed and has shown unparalleled courage by defying even the Supreme Court and suffering imprisonment for contempt of court while standing up for what she considered to be right, has given a devastating account of what the Muslims in Gujarat had to face. In a long essay in *Outlook*, she wrote:

"Within hours of the Godhra outrage, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal put into motion a meticulously planned programme against the Muslim community. Officially the number of dead is 800. Independent reports put the figure at well over 2,000. More than a hundred and fifty thousand people, driven from their homes, now live in refugee camps. Women were stripped, gang-raped, parents were bludgeoned to death in front of their children. Two hundred and forty dargahs and 180 masjids were destroyed — in Ahmedabad the tomb of Wali Gujarati, the founder of modern Urdu poetry was demolished and paved over in the course of a night. The tomb of the musician Ustad Faiyaz Ali Khan was desecrated and wreathed in burning tyres. Arsonists burned and looted shops, homes, hotels, textiles mills, buses and private cars. Hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs."[2]

Mobs had been gathering at selected spots; Muslim houses were marked; even high court judges were not spared; the former MP Iqbal Ehsan Jafri was burnt alive. His telephone calls to the Chief Secretary, the Police Commissioner and to many others were not attended to. It was clear that the mobs were meticulously organized; the operation was on a military scale; they were armed with petrol bombs, guns, knives, swords and tridents. Even the elite joined in the orgy; they had lists of Muslim shops, establishments and businesses. To assist in the murder and the loot, Dalits and Adivasis were brought from far and near. According to Roy and many others, they had mobile phones to coordinate the action. Trucks with

thousands of gas cylinders were loaded weeks in advance; they were used to blow up Muslim commercial establishments. The culprits had not just police protection and police connivance, they had also police cover.

Apart from both the English and the language press, barring Gujarati newspapers like *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar*, the coverage even in the foreign press was so shocking and critical that it brought nothing but shame to India, known for her respect for human rights. *Time* magazine, for instance, gave heart-rendering details of the atrocities on the Muslims. Its report began with the story of a young Muslim girl named Afsana who lived on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, the capital of Gujarat. She heard that a Muslim mob had torched a train, the Sabarmati Express at Godhra, she was appalled and very frightened. She knew that revenge would be nigh. Her neighbourhood, Naroda, was largely Hindu. On the day after the Godhra killings, local Hindu leaders gathered a crowd of 2,000 residents and gave them simple instructions: Muslims had to be destroyed. When part of the mob reached Afsana's house, she fled with her five-year-old brother to a Hindu neighbour's house. From her neighbour's roof, Afsana saw the mob pull her parents out of their home, douse them in gasoline and set them alight.

Her four sisters were stripped, raped and killed. Along the lanes, other Muslim houses were burning. The story in *Time* continued: "After a couple of hours, her neighbour said it was safe for her to leave. It was a trick. In the lane, a pack of men

attacked her. 'I fell on the ground,' she says, 'and I could see all these people. They were people I knew who lived around our house.' Both she and her brother were splashed with gasoline but she managed to scramble up and get away, clutching her brother's hand. Both of their clothes were alight. When she reached a wall and started climbing up, she lost hold of her brother. Once on a roof, she looked down and watched him burnt to death."[3]

Then there was another chilling incident reported in the *International Herald Tribune* thus: "The mob of 500 Hindus with wooden sticks and plastic jugs of kerosene swarmed into this tiny farming town, chanting 'Kill the Muslims! Kill the Muslims!' Trying to flee but surrounded on all sides by the Hindu crowd, most of the town's Muslims took shelter in the one place they believed was safe: a one-room house with thick concrete walls and metal-barred windows at the end of their neighbourhood. But the throng soon followed them there and encircled the house. 'Get rid of the Muslims,' said some of the Hindus; the Muslims panicked and started crying, those inside the house begged for their lives. 'Please forgive us. Please let us go,' said Ruksanabano Ibrahim, 20, who had locked herself inside with a dozen family members. They kept saying, 'We are not your enemies. What have we done to you?'" The influential journal, which has a wide circulation throughout the world, reported further: "Then, just as it did moments earlier with shops, cars and other homes in the neighbourhood, the mob doused cloth-wrapped sticks with kerosene, ignited them and hurled them through the windows. The terrorized

occupants, who were locked inside the house, tried in vain to smother the flames with woollen shawls and douse them with bottles of drinking water. When police officers arrived half an hour later and broke open the door, 29 people were dead. Most of the others in the house were seriously burned."[4]

There was yet another hair raising account of a Hindu wife married to a Muslim who was brutally murdered by the Hindu mob; it was written by Siddharth Varadarajan, Deputy Chief of Bureau of *The Times of India*. His office in Ahmedabad sent him a photograph with the following caption: "*On a hot and dusty patch of asphalt lies the naked body of a woman, Geetaben, her clothes stripped off and thrown carelessly near her. One piece of her underclothing lies a foot away from her body, the other is clutched desperately in her left hand. Her left arm is bloodied, as is her torso, which appears to have deep gashes. Her left thigh is covered in blood and she is wearing a small anklet. Her plastic chappals sit sadly alongside her lifeless body and in the middle of the photo frame is a gnarled, red, hate-filled remnant of a brick, perhaps the one her assailants used to deliver their final blow.*"

Varadarajan reported the story of Geetaben in lurid details: "Geetaben was killed in Ahmedabad on March 25, in broad daylight, near a bus stop close to her home. She was a Hindu who in the eyes of the Hindu separatists currently ruling Gujarat had committed the cardinal sin of falling in love with a Muslim. When the Sangh parivar mobs came for him, she stood her ground long enough for him to flee. But the killers seemed more interested in her. She was dragged out, stripped naked and killed. No lethal dose of Zyklon-B delivered surreptitiously

in a darkened, secluded chamber. Geetaben's murder was never meant to be a furtive, secret affair." Varadarajan also reported that there was "not a single Muslim business left in Gujarat. Photocopying stalls near Gujarati courts turn Muslim lawyers away. Men with beards are not served in restaurants and shops in the state. Muslim mothers pray their children won't call them *ammi* on the street".[5]

However in the midst of the communal fire burning all around, there have been Hindus who risked their lives to save Muslims from the rage of communal Hindus; a practising lawyer, Veersingh Rathod, gave protection to no less than 25 Muslim families in Naroda; since then he has not moved out of his own place as the lumpens, who had come to know what he had done, were thirsting for his blood. He was certain that the police would not protect him. There is also the incident, reported by the press, about a young Muslim, who was running with a small child, when the hoodlums stopped him. He assured them that he was a Hindu. They allowed him to go. He had hardly gone a few steps, when the child called out *abba* to his father; the hoodlums heard him say so and caught hold of them again and burnt to death both the young man and his child.

What Barkha Dutt, the TV star, saw was still worse; she found "the body of a woman, mouth agape, legs wrenched open, her head thrown back... one arm still flailing in the air, probably her last attempt to fight the man or men who had raped her, before killing her".[6]

Sagari Chhabra, a poet and film maker, went on a visit to Ahmedabad; she came across many victims of the genocide but what she heard from Mohammad Maroof, a resident of Naroda Patia, was so ghastly that she hung her head in shame and wondered what had happened to the people who were the inheritors of the mission of non-violence, love and compassion of the greatest Hindu of our times. Her record of what Mohammad Maroof told her makes woeful reading: "It was here that one of our neighbours (name withheld) of Gangotri Society came. He said, 'You must be hungry and thirsty, come to my house'. He was after all our neighbour and used to come to our weddings and functions. We thought this was *bhaichara* – brotherhood – so we all went. He took us to a large *godaam* – storage space. He said – 'Sit here, nothing will happen to you here.' Then he called his son, '*Beta, jitne hain unko bulao* – son, call all those who are there'. We found we were surrounded by people who were armed. They had *talwars* – swords. We ran. From the other side, another neighbour (name withheld) came. We were surrounded from both sides and trapped in a *gali* (alley). We couldn't escape…

"They had some powder with which you don't have to strike a match, you just throw it and it burns. They also threw petrol, kerosene, black oil and black tyres on us… I was below in the heap which they set fire to. There was a young girl, her father's name is Kabir, they told her – '*Beta, hum tumhe kuch nahi karenge, bahar aa jao* – we won't do anything to you, dear, come out.' She did. *Phir uski izzat looti* – they raped her, *maata jaat nanga kiya* – stripped her naked – and pushed her into the fire.

"There was another girl who was hiding in the corner. They pounced on her, raped her and struck a sword through her below (points to his genitals) and up to here (points to his throat). She only screamed one word '*Chacha*' (uncle). I heard that and got up. My three clothes were soaked in oil… Those people started running away (this account of how the mob started moving away is unclear, he does not explain it in his testimony). We (the survivors) started taking the people out from the burning pit. The police came much later. They (the police) said we have come to your rescue. We took 65 people out of which 26 were still alive. The rest were all dead. The dead included my wife, my daughter and my brother's wife (he says this blandly, in a matter of fact voice). *Maine khud laashen nikaali* – I took out their dead bodies myself. The police said leave them here or the others will also die. So we left them and took the living to the hospital (it is here he breaks down). Sister, till now, I haven't received their dead bodies or a post mortem report. Out of the 26 who were living, 10 died in the hospital."[7]

Namita Bhandare, a noted novelist, wrote in *Hindustan Times*, that police officers who had done their jobs honestly were transferred, while the incompetent ones were posted in their places; these officers were more interested in pleasing their masters than ensuring peace and normalcy. She cited the case of Shivanand Jha, Joint Commissioner of Police, who had fired at a mob in Sabarmati because it was demanding that some Muslim boys whom the officer had arrested be

handed over to the mob. He refused. The mob reacted angrily; the officer had to open fire. One Hindu was killed. Two days later, Jha was at Sabarmati Ashram, where another mob was demanding that the well-known social rebel, Medha Patkar be evicted from a peace meeting; he resisted the demand. In the melee that followed, some correspondents and press photographers were burnt. Shivanand was blamed. A.P. Parghi, the DCP, who had assisted Jha, had to resort to lathi charge to bring the mob under control. The next day Parghi was also transferred. Why? asked Mrs.Bhandare. They said "justice"; but it was because the Hindu mob complained to the authorities against him.

Mrs. Bhandare heard several such complaints of transfer. She said: "To understand the complete breakdown of the state in Gujarat, one has to consider only three incidents. In Gandhinagar, where the state government has its offices, the Wakf Board office was attacked. For the first time ever, curfew was imposed in Gandhinagar. In another incident, the mob burnt down trucks along with their Muslim drivers. This happened at the front gate of the high court — another symbol of the Indian State. And finally the dargah of Wali Gujarati, the seventeenth century Urdu poet was vandalized and destroyed. This happened in front of the police commissioner's office." Mrs. Bhandare went on lividly: "Does the Indian State function in Gujarat — a state where sitting judges fear for their lives only because they are Muslims?"[8]

Rajmohan Gandhi, a grandson of the Mahatma and an intellectual of the highest integrity and was horrified at the

theory of "action and reaction" propounded by the Chief Minister and supported by many other Hindu dignitaries. In his article in the *Hindustan Times*, he wrote that he was dismayed at the statement of the RSS spokesman M.G. Vaidya, who had called the post-Godhra violence in Gujarat a "natural reaction of Hindus" which no government could have controlled; the whole Hindu society, irrespective of caste, creed and political affiliations had risen and reacted violently against it. There was also the statement of Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das who said, "the Muslims roasted alive 57 *kar sevaks*. It is a matter of shame that the government is protecting Muslims while Hindus are unprotected in their country, even by a BJP government".

The Mahant went on: "Do you think there would be no reaction to a bloody action? Why should I stop the movement on this ground? *Advani aur Atal hamare yagya ko bhrasht kar rahe hain* (Advani and Atal are polluting our yagya — sacred ceremony)." He warned that if they did not hand over the land at Ayodhya, it would be taken over by force. Similarly Swami Jayendra Saraswati the Kanchi Sankaracharya pontificated that "there is a reaction for every action". Rajmohan Gandhi was livid; he wrote: "As would many other Hindus, I strongly object to the suggestion that gassing, burning alive or cutting to bits, women and children was a 'natural reaction' of Hindus to the Godhra carnage. Some who dare to call themselves Hindus may have done these horrifying things, but Hindus as a whole are not that barbaric. Such defamatory statements cannot be allowed to go unchallenged."[9]

The attack on Muslim-owned establishments in many places in Gujarat, according to reports in the national and international press, were pre-planned; their correspondents collected figures of the destruction of commercial units from official sources and police reports; these confirmed that in the initial stage itself, 72 hotels and restaurants owned by Muslims were demolished, 35 properties belonging to Muslim residents of a village in the Mehsana district, which is home to the Chilliya Muslims were burnt down. Mrs. Bhandare wondered how did the miscreants know these were owned by Muslims? Apparently leaders of the rioters had done their research work. She remarked: "The Chilliya Muslims who were at the top of the economic ladder were singled out for loot. Autorickshaw drivers as well as scrap recyclers and vegetable vendors were also not spared."

Brook Larmer, the special correspondent of *Newsweek* of New York met Mohammed Rafiq Lalmiya during his recent visit to Gujarat; Lalmiya was a rickshaw driver. He lived in a village called Naroda Patia, which was attacked by a Hindu mob. Larmer reported, "Lalmiya, a gaunt man in sandals and a soiled yellow shirt, fled in terror with his wife and two children. Today he has come back, his fear overcome by a desire to salvage something — anything, from his former life. What he finds, however, is a community utterly destroyed. 'Nothing is left,' he says, staring blankly at the twisted metal minarets on the remains of the mosque. 'It's completely gone'."[10]

Brinda Karat, an influential crusader for women's rights had taken a contingent of CPM workers from West Bengal to

give aid and succour to the genocide victims of Gujarat. What she saw and heard had left her numb. She gave a poignant account of one incident to *Frontline* which was heartbreaking: "Salimbhai lives in the madrasa camp in Sabarkantha district. He is the elected sarpanch of Kidiyad village in Malpur taluka. There are 26 sarpanches in the taluka, and two of them are Muslims. Salimbhai was elected with the largest margin in the taluka. 'Seventy per cent of my voters were Hindus,' he told a delegation of the Left Front from West Bengal: 'They voted for me against a candidate from their own community because they have seen my social work for the village.' But such examples of secular politics were apparently intolerable to the rulers. So his village was attacked.

"On March 2, when news came of the arson, killings and attacks in neighbouring areas, there was no help forthcoming from the police. Salimbhai with 118 other Muslims decided to move to a more secure place. Concerned about ensuring the safety of the women and children, they sent them out in the first truck, escorted by some men. Among the 84 persons squeezed into the truck were his wife and 15-year-old son. The truck had travelled a fair distance from the village when it was stopped by a mob led by saffron-scarfed men shouting obscene slogans against Muslims. They could see that the truck was mainly filled with women and children. They burnt it. Sixty-seven people were burnt to death; among them were Salimbhai's wife and child. Later Salim learnt that within his village too people were killed and that the victims included his uncle. No one has been arrested."[11]

From the survey made by the Concerned Citizens' Tribunal, headed by the retired Supreme Court judge, V.R. Krishna Iyer, even Muslim religious places were vandalized; close to 240 mosques and dargahs had been razed to the ground by the rioters; they also burnt all the documents pertaining to them so that no claims could be considered for their reconstruction.

A kind of religious sanctity was given to all these acts of vandalism by the authorities; they were declared as enemy property, which,,it was alleged, were used to malign Hinduism. The Hindus were therefore called upon through in a pamphlet by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to sever all connections with Muslims and in "all their conscience save our country by boycotting Muslims economically and socially". It was widely circulated among the Hindus, particularly the youth, who were told, according to *The Indian Express*: "What is your security even in the most decent and secure locality in spite of having security guards? Traitors and terrorists are coming by truckloads. They will kill your security guards and enter your bungalows. They will murder you in your drawing rooms and bedrooms. Those who talk of Hindu-Muslim unity are only maligning their own religion. There can be no equality between Hindus and Muslims. They do not consider Bharat as their motherland. Hindu-Muslim unity is a farce. Communal harmony and brotherhood is all a drama."[12]

In desperation, the well-known dancer Mallika Sarabhai, a scion of the best known industrial family of Ahmedabad, came out with an emotionally-charged indictment of all those

responsible for the genocide who had besmirched the face of her beloved Gujarat. She wrote in *The Times of India*: "I accuse. For they have taken away my pride at being a human being, the smile that lurked on my lips when I spoke of my city. They have emptied my wardrobe of the colour saffron. They have taken away my joy of belonging to a land of understanding and compassion for difference. And the ability to say with a glint in my eye that I belong to the people who gave Gandhiji his non-violence." She then catalogued her accusations one by one: "I accuse, for they have turned us all into puppets, pulled by the strings of selfish opportunism. Into a voiceless, gutless race. For having taken away the worst names we could call those others: animal; junglee; rakshasa; beast. For leaving us with only one name derogatory enough for what we have become: mankind.

"I accuse, for I have let myself be numbed into docility. Into feeling that I could get on with my work and things would be all right. That ultimately good would prevail. For letting the educated and 'should know better, should care more' group become the silent majority neutered by the vociferous lunatics set on self-destruction.

"I accuse. We have become a country of the blind and deaf, the self-centred and the soulless. We have become a country where our leaders lead us on superfluous paths of promises. Where leaders have become bleeders. Where warped priorities become the toast of the town, while reality withers with the disenfranchized." Mallika Sarabhai concluded: "There

are no external solutions left. There is no 'we' and no 'they'. We are them. Myself and every citizen of this once great nation. Yes, I accuse. Myself and every citizen of this once great nation."[13]

It was commonly feared that the police protected the Hindu criminals. They refused to register FIRs against them. Again, even where FIRs were filed, criminals were not arrested; witnesses were afraid to testify against them. Meanwhile the genocide continued unabated; normalcy rarely returned; curfew was lifted and then re-imposed. The killers stalked Gujarat's streets. The lynch mob became the arbiter of the routine affairs of daily life: they decided who could live where, who could say what, who could meet who, and where and when. Its mandate was all pervading; it covered religious affairs as well as property disputes, family altercations, planning and allocation of water resources. Businesses belonging to Muslims were shut down. They were not served in restaurants. Their children were not welcome in schools. They were too terrified to sit for examinations. Muslim parents lived in dread that their infants might forget what was told to them — no to ever call them *Ammi* or *Abba*; if they did, they would be killed or burnt instantly. Everywhere Muslims were unashamedly informed that this was just the beginning; the end would be much worse for them.

There was almost total destruction of Muslim businesses; prosperous Muslim families were targeted and crippled financially. The number of insurance claims was a clear indication that the backbone of thousands of prosperous

Muslims had been broken. The National Insurance Company confirmed that the claims with them exceeded Rs. 540 million. The New India Assurance Company also reported that they had received 1058 claims worth Rs. 340 million while the claims registered with the United India Assurance Company came to 1300 amounting to Rs. 400 million. The Oriental Insurance Company was in receipt of 973 claims for Rs. 290 million. This was only the tip of the iceberg; the overall economic losses of the Muslims were staggering. The looters had made no distinction between small and big business establishments; they destroyed whatever they could get hold of — hotels, restaurants, warehouses, shops, factories.

Indu Kumar Jani, a social activist in Ahmedabad, said he was not aware of the fact that Tulsi, a chain of restaurants all over Gujarat belonged to Muslims. He added that most of the customers were Hindus and none of them knew that these were owned by Muslims; the same was the case with the Sarvodya 'pure vegetarian' restaurant. Not even Muslims knew that these eateries were owned by members of their own community. How then did the miscreants know? They seemed to have been properly briefed. They gutted as many as 38 of them in the initial days of the riots in Ahmedabad alone. Fatima Bibi had taken shelter in Shah Alam Dargah camp after the rioters said that they burnt her husband's warehouse in one of the worst affected areas, Naroda Patia; thereafter she said her husband became almost insane. He had stopped talking and rarely ate anything given to him. And to add to these

miseries of the hapless Muslims, Hindus were told to boycott their shops and restaurants, not to employ any of them, nor use their services in any way.

Husain Umarji, who was running a relief camp in Godhra city, said that even grants for their schools and societies had been stopped because the donors were afraid they might be targeted by Hindu miscreants and killed. He said that prior to riots, the transport business, for instance, was owned by Muslims in many districts but it had been completely destroyed; thousands of trucks belonging to Muslims had been burnt. The goons who did it did not realize that their insane act would also harm the general trade and industry, dominated by Hindus. Likewise when they smashed the diamond cutting establishments, run by Muslims, they were blissfully ignorant of the substantial loss they caused to the foreign exchange earnings of India.

How did this madness continue so unchecked in an industrially progressive state like Gujarat? Rajdeep Sardesai, who had covered the affected extensively for Star TV said that it was the passion of hate and prejudice against Muslims which had gripped practically every section of Hindus from the Brahmins to the Dalits. As he put it: "The sheer social and geographical spread of the conflagration, cutting across traditional caste and class barriers is astounding and points to a shocking collapse." In a scathing analysis of the terrible phenomenon, Rajdeep Sardesai pinpointed the factors which brought this about:

"How else does one explain the large presence of Dalits in the rioting? Or the manner in which migrant labour – a large number of them OBCs – ruthlessly attacked their co-workers in the Naroda-Patia area of Ahmedabad? Or why the violence spread to Sabarkantha and Panchmahals, areas in which the local Adivasi community has been at the heart of the rioting? Or the grotesque manner in which affluent people walked into shops in Ahmedabad's main business district and loaded their Marutis with the loot? In all instances, there has been one common factor: for the most part, the Muslim has been the victim, his life, family and livelihood systematically targeted. The question is, why should the people of a state which gave us Mahatma Gandhi, which has a flourishing entrepreneurial spirit and which even today has a strong NGO movement, succumb so easily to communal polarization? Gandhi used this creatively as a mobilizing tool while nurturing the notion of *sarva dharma samabhava*. The parivar has used this destructively to create notions of 'Hindu brotherhood' by positing the Muslim as the common enemy."[14]

Some of these facts, as narrated above, are substantiated by impartial observers. However it cannot be denied that a number of Hindus have also died in police firing. Their properties and businesses too have been adversely affected; but that cannot be compared to what the Muslims suffered; as *Frontline* reported: "Official data obtained by *Frontline* makes it clear that Muslims were the victims of a largely one-sided,

well-planned massacre. In fact, it makes little sense to describe what happened as a communal riot. Although several independent authorities believe that the data understates Muslim casualties, they nonetheless bear out media allegations of police bias. Although the number of Muslims killed was more than five times the number of Hindus, and in value terms Muslims lost almost 10 times the property that Hindus lost, police firing was directed on both communities evenly."[15]

The veracity of some of these facts were questioned by the communal Hindus; they alleged that most of it was motivated and exaggerated. One of their spokesmen, Balbir K. Punj, a BJP Member of Parliament accused Arundhati Roy, for instance, of distortion of facts and even of outright lying; he said her version pertaining to the death of the ex-MP Jafri, was a tissue of lies. She had written that while Jafri was being burnt, his daughters were raped. The daughters, Punj said, were in fact in America. Roy apologized for the error but Punj was not satisfied. He castigated her and the media, both print and electronic, for their false campaign against the Hindus in Gujarat.

He told the *Outlook* magazine: "Loss of 900-odd innocent lives (both Hindus and Muslims) is definitely not a 'genocide' of any one community. Yet it is one more shameful event in the long and unfortunate chain of communal riots in India, since the 1893 Bombay and Azamgarh riots. Beginning from the 1714 Holi riots in the Mughal period, Ahmedabad itself has witnessed no less than 10 major recorded

riots. The Sangh parivar was not there in 1714, nor was it a dominant force during the 1969 and 1985 riots. So what explains these riots when Gujarat was not a 'Sangh parivar petri dish'? Out of those who perished in the communal frenzy, over one-third are Hindus. Following Godhra, massive spontaneous violence broke out in various parts of Gujarat against the Muslims. Since the rioters were mainly Hindus, they also accounted for about 75 per cent of those who fell to police bullets in the first three days. In fact, till April 18, Hindus accounted for more deaths in police firing than Muslims. But for almost three weeks now, the violence has been led by Muslims against Hindus and, naturally, a bulk of the casualties are accounted for by them.

"The police have booked 34,000 rioters, majority of whom are Hindus. Both communities have suffered heavy loss of business and property in the arson and looting. While rioters are communal in picking their targets, looters are not – and they target at random. One lakh Muslims are struggling in relief camps, but so are 40,000 Hindus. This is a horrible riot, which is sad enough, but why call it a genocide? Whom does it help? Not the riot victims, only our enemies across the border… The secular pack is not only guilty of parading half-truths but also of condoning and inciting violence…"

Punj also criticized the Editors' Guild, which had come down heavily on the Gujarati press for its coverage of the riots… He wrote: "Surprisingly, the Guild has nothing critical to say on the role of the electronic media and of the Roys, guilty of blackening

India's name, generating more communal hate at a critical time and demonising a section of citizens through half-truths and complete lies. Some rioters may be guilty of rape and should be punished for their heinous crimes, but what about those who have raped the truth and the country in the last two months?."[16]

Some of the facts and figures, so eloquently advanced by Punj, may be true but his charge of distortion and exaggeration of facts is not in consonance with what has been pointed out by responsible Indian and foreign organizations whose credibility could not be challenged. The National Human Rights Commission in its report referred to it: "Given the widespread reports and allegations of groups of well-organized persons, armed with mobile telephones and addresses, singling out certain homes and properties for death and destruction in certain districts, sometimes within view of police stations and personnel, the further question arises as to what the factors were, and who the players were in the situation that went out of control."[17] Similarly the National Minorities Commission pointed out in its report that "attacks were organized by the VHP and the Bajrang Dal who had earlier gathered information on minority houses, shops, etc. The attacks were planned accordingly, with first looting, and then burning of shops and establishments along with brutal violence, stabbing and battering of people; besides burning them alive with kerosene, petrol and diesel; they also alleged sexual assault on women and gang-rapes in the presence of their relations. The victims were then killed and burnt".[18]

The Human Rights' Watch of America in its report said: "What happened in Gujarat was not a spontaneous uprising; it was a carefully orchestrated attack against Muslims. The attacks were planned in advance and organized with extensive participation of the police and state government officials." The European Union condemned the carnage in Gujarat as "a kind of apartheid... it has parallels with the Germany of 1930s". United Kingdom and Canada also expressed grave concern at the massacre and loot of the Muslims; so did several other foreign countries. Only the Muslim countries were indifferent to the happenings; there was not even "a whimper of protest from them at the official level."

By targeting authors like Roy for a lapse, truth cannot be suppressed; most impartial reports confirmed that what happened in Gujarat was a clear case of genocide. Punj objected to the use of the word; so have many other well-meaning Hindus. But according to the definition given by the Oxford Dictionary, it means "the mass extermination of human beings, especially of a particular race or nation". If a mob of thousands kills and burns Muslims in Muslim-populated areas, what is it, if not genocide. Pritish Nandy, the Shiv Sena MP was anguished at what had happened in Godhra and Gujarat; but he was furious at what had not happened to relieve the pain of the sufferers and to rebuild their lives. He quoted a poem of Bob Dylan:

How many ears must one man have
Before he can hear people cry?

How many deaths will it take till he knows
That too many people have died?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind,
The answer is blowin' in the wind.[19]

The atrocities on Muslims in Gujarat were witnessed by hundreds of Indian and foreign observers; some of them might have exaggerated while commenting on what they saw; some wrong information might also have crept in their statements; but on the whole what the communal Hindus did, as the Prime Minister himself stated, was "a blot on the face of India".

The last word on it has been said by the former Chief Justice J.S. Verma who heads the National Human Rights Commission. He said: "The Gujarat carnage was nothing short of war in terms of the suffering undergone by the affected people. How is it different from war? Are their sufferings any less than in war." In war people die while fighting; in Gujarat innocent and helpless men, women and children were taken out of their homes and burnt alive for no fault of theirs. Justice Verma asked: "How can this happen in our country? It haunts every patriotic Indian. I hope I don't live to witness it again".[20]

3

Relief Camps

The tragedy of the victims of the genocide was multiplied when they were sent to the few relief camps that were set-up for them mostly by unofficial agencies. The attitude of the Government to the running of these camps was pathetic. The compensation that it promised to the victims of the carnage was half of what was given to the victims of Godhra. The material supplied to the camps was also insufficient to the growing needs of the sufferers who came from Ahmedabad, Vadodara and other affected cities. Even the appeal for funds was not heeded by the public; the response was cold and dismal.

The Times of India came out with a severely critical editorial; it deprecated the callousness of concerned citizens to the relief funds floated by various welfare organizations. It wrote: "The contrast couldn't be more stark. Flashback to the Gujarat earthquake in 2001. In a magnificent outpouring of compassion, India rose as one to rush relief supplies to the

affected. It was a reaffirmation of the human spirit of concern for fellow citizens. Yet today, when an entirely avoidable tragedy is being played out in Gujarat, that fellow feeling is singularly lacking."[1] The Editors' Guild in its report had noted that newspapers in India had not started relief funds for the victims of Gujarat as they did for every calamity in the past; this also applied to the electronic media; they were perhaps apprehensive that their effort would not receive the necessary support from readers and viewers.

The condition within the relief camps was also most distressing; according to *The Times of India*: "Today tens of thousands of terrified riot survivors are huddled in makeshift camps, even more have sought refuge in the homes of relatives. The only help that these desperate people are getting is from needy members of their own community, many of whom have lost their homes and loved ones in these riots. A cynical political class has sought to explain its unforgivable apathy with the question 'What about the victims of Godhra'?" They were officially looked after but as the newspaper pointed out: "The task of rehabilitating the victims of Gujarat is monumental. It will involve reconstruction of homes and finding work in the face of the Sangh's call to boycott Muslim businesses and deny work to them. Above all, it will involve counselling to overcome the trauma of having witnessed unspeakable horrors. Perhaps nothing will completely heal these scars, but the message going out to Gujarat is that India simply does not care."[2]

Even the findings of the National Human Rights Commission, which recorded in terrifying detail the vicious barbarism to which the helpless minority was subjected, did not move many in the country; those who spoke, were either ignored or what they said did not produce any tangible benefits for them. The perpetrators of the massacre of the innocents went about happily with their barbaric acts. There had never been such lack of sympathy on the part of civil society; it showed that hatred had penetrated so deep that it had destroyed civil values and humanitarian concern for even the sick and the wounded, the aged and the infants.

Many sensitive Hindus were no doubt shocked at what they saw, heard and read. Shobhaa De, the celebrated novelist wrote bitterly against all those who demeaned themselves by refusing to come forward to help the sufferers. She wrote in her column: "I asked prominent influential and affluent Gujaratis why they hadn't mobilized resources to help the affected victims of their home state. Why the silence? Why the passivity? Why the indifference? Didn't it matter? In the past, the community had been instantly galvanized into taking prompt action – money by the millions, fund-raising shows, volunteers, food, clothes, donations, medicines. This time there was just silence. An extraordinary response from a community that prides itself on its ethnic identity. What on earth had happened to the Gujjus? The generous Gujjus? Where had fellow-feeling gone?" She asked especially the business community: "Where are the mighty captains of industry? A

few did speak up. But sorry to say, those carefully prepared statements sounded alarmingly political. Even hollow. The ones whose voices were heard, seemed to have an agenda of their own that went beyond plain decency and human concern."[3] The rest of the people in high places in other states also showed the same lack of sympathy as if the suffering in Gujarat was of no concern to them. It made one wonder whether the unity of India was indeed hollow.

Shobhaa De narrated the reaction of a councillor from Delhi who was stricken by what she experienced in some relief camps outside Ahmedabad. She told De: "For the first time I felt I needed trauma counselling myself. I couldn't sleep at night… the horror of those terrible images kept coming back to me."[4] Why was there this cold silence? This apathy? This callousness on the part of those who had never failed to rise to such occasions in the past. The reason was obvious; it was because this time most of the sufferers were Muslims; even those Hindus who wanted to help feared that their gesture would be misunderstood by their co-religionists who had decided that Muslims were a dangerous people who had to be annihilated. Any form of assistance to them would be misconstrued as communal by their friends and supporters. To what mean level had even some of the concerned citizens fallen?

The condition in the various relief camps, according to all accounts, was miserable. It is well-known that right from the beginning, the official attitude about these camps had been

most unhelpful. In fact many of them especially ministers had publicly asked for disbanding them saying their continuance would provoke communal disturbance. Agonizing stories were reported about the pathetic manner in which these camps were run; they were said to be not only short of food and utensils, but even water. For a measly meal, the inmates had to wait in a queue for hours together. Even infants and children, crying for milk, were left unattended. Essentials were in short supply; the victims went from place to place asking for basic requirements but they would get no response. NGOs working in such relief camps, were shocked by what officials bluntly told them — they would be happy if the victims died.

At one of the biggest rallies held in recent years in Delhi to protest against the genocide in Gujarat, Maulana Asad Madani, President of Jamiat-ul- Ulama told the victims of violence that it did not matter if one or two lakhs of them died but unity between Muslims and Dalits should be preserved. What a shocking statement! What the Muslims in Gujarat faced was the threat to their very existence; the unity between Muslims and Dalits was irrelevant to what they were going through. Moreover the Maulana forgot that in the massacre and loot of the Muslims in Gujarat, the Dalits were in the forefront. They were assisted by the police who admitted that they killed more Muslims than Hindus. *Hindustan Times* reported: "Out of the 184 people who died in police firing since the violence began, 104 are Muslims."[5]

Priyanka Kakodkar gave a grim picture of the trauma that the children, orphaned by the holocaust went through in the

relief camps: "When night falls, a quiet fear invades the smoky relief camps in Ahmedabad. For the children of the Gujarat riots, the witching hour has begun. In the slow hours till dawn, many huddle close to their mothers, struggling to stay awake. The horrific memories that they try to hold at bay during the day stalk them in their sleep. For the riot's children, there is a thin dividing line between memories and nightmares. There are visions of parents being dragged out of their homes and cut into pieces, of brothers and sisters thrown into flames. There are memories of women being brutally raped, foetuses ripped from pregnant bellies and of their own spine-chilling escapes from imminent death."[6] There were some 42,000 children among the over 1 lakh inmates in Gujarat's relief camps. Those working in the field — civil rights groups, NGOs — said there were at least 30,000 children in Ahmedabad's camps alone. Many of them were orphans who had lost all their relatives. They had been worst affected by the carnage. Unlike adults, they could not fully absorb or vocalize what they saw. But the impact on them was the deepest.

According to Dr. R.S. Srinivasa Murthy, professor of psychiatry at the Bangalore-based National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences: "First came the mobs — burning, pillaging, murdering and raping in front of the eyes of these hapless children. Then came displacement — after their homes were torched. Suddenly, family, friends and schools are a chimera." Analysing the terrible effect on the children, Dr. Srinivasa observed: "The trauma seen in children who survived

the riots in Gujarat is similar to the trauma children suffered after the Bhopal gas tragedy, the Uttarkashi earthquake and the earthquake in the state. So they ended up extremely prone to anxiety disorders, acute depression and stress."[7]

It was possibly even worse. The Ahmedabad-based NGO Centre For Development tried to involve the camp children in art classes but they ended up drawing burning houses and dead people. "There is a lot of anger among the children," said Mira Mehta of the Centre. "You will see a lot of small, silent children playing around in the camps. They don't look rattled but they are badly affected inside." That's not hard to discover. A three-year-old boy playing in the camp said occasionally: *Abba ko mar diya. goli, goli*! (They killed my father; bullet, bullet!) No amount of counselling would have helped, said psychiatrists: "There is so much fear and anger among children that we can't even tell them that it is all over. Until it stops, how can they begin healing?"[8] asked Sandhya Surendradas of the NGO, Sanchetna's Child Survival Project.

Apart from the Muslims in the relief camps bearing the hardship of living in the most miserable conditions, those Muslims who were outside fared no better. Their houses were destroyed, their businesses looted; they had nowhere to go, they went in search of some work to sustain themselves, but no one came forward to oblige them. The daily wage-earners continued to starve; they could not venture out and find work in the dangerous environment outside Muslim localities. Shafi Madani, chairman of Islami Relief Committee, Gujarat (IRCG)

which had been involved in relief work ever since the outbreak of the riots mentioned that his unit provided food to thousands of sufferers; but the number went on increasing. They could not provide for all hence many died of starvation.

Frontline, the fortnightly owned by the Hindu newspaper and edited by N. Ram, gave a graphic account of the state of affairs in the relief camps. It reported: "Around 1.5 lakh refugees are stranded in Gujarat's relief camps. Several people die in continuing violence every day, adding to the toll which has already crossed 800. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Bajrang Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party workers stand accused of having orchestrated targeted attacks against Muslims across the State, killing them and hounding them out of their villages and ghettos. The attacks continue relentlessly in Ahmedabad and other parts of north and central Gujarat. The police barge into Muslim homes and harass residents as part of the combing operations. Village residents whose homes have been destroyed are living in open fields. There is no way out for the homeless refugees in relief camps. They cannot return to their homes or start work again."[9] The District Collectors urged the people in the camps to return to their homes, assuring them of security but nobody went back as they did not trust the local police and were afraid of the mobs.

Bismillah Khan, the Bharat Ratna awardee, returned to the Baska relief camp from a meeting at his Rameshra village in Halol on April 12, disappointed that the local leaders had not shown up. But little did he know then that his house and

the houses of two others were burnt soon after he left the village, as he made his way back to the relief camp that night. It was an unspoken message to stay away. On the night before the next meeting scheduled for April 16, three more houses were set on fire. "How can they return when the police have done nothing to make sure they would be safe, when their houses and shops have been totally destroyed" asked the great maestro. Others who attempted to return also ran back to the relief camps. Alibhai Rehman Khatri's Hindu friends from Rawalia village, visited him at the Baska relief camp and convinced him to return and reopen his shop. "I took a loan of Rs. 6,000, stocked the shop with supplies and reopened my shop for eight days," he said. "Then there was a Bajrang Dal meeting in a nearby village, where they apparently planned to burn my shop and kill me because I had the guts to return'."[10] He stayed behind in the camp. Meanwhile his shop was looted and burnt.

In many places, even police escorts proved to be of no use. For instance, they took Pathan Jafar Khan back to his home in Baranpura, Vadodara, to assess the damage. 'While they were filing the report, a mob attacked them from all sides. The policemen ran away. Those in the Special Reserve Police tent stationed there refused to come out and help. Likewise Mehboob Sheikh from Kanvat village wanted to return but the police warned him that it would not be safe for him. These cases are illustrative of what was the situation all around.

Even though relief camps were the only refuge for the victims officials were keen to reduce their numbers and close

down most of them. But as the flow of victims was unending, they could not do it. Vadodara bristled with looters; other places were no better. In Bamanwad village, in Panchmahal district, a mob of arsonists destroyed 27 houses; people were so frightened that they slept in open fields. In relief camps in Ahmedabad, hundreds of young students were housed but they were scared to travel to examination centres where mobs ruled the streets. The police and the Rapid Action Force had to struggle hard to rescue them. Many of them could not, therefore, appear for their examinations.

The well-known painter and social activist Anjolie Ela Menon gave a heart-rending account of what she saw in the relief camps: "Yes, like so many of us, I too postponed the moment of reckoning for two whole months. But until we touch them in the flesh, see them with our own eyes, hold their hands in our hands, hear their cries of despair, they remain a statistic in the morning paper, pawns in the games of politicians. They are far removed from us, creating no disturbance in our daily lives." She continued to narrate: "In the relief camp in Ahmedabad I am aghast at the numbers. I am deeply humbled that someone rushes to offer me cold water. How can I accept this when right at the entrance of the makeshift office, a 10-day-old baby lies on the bare floor beside its mother while the grandmother fans the flies off it in a gesture that speaks of both love and despair. Despair is the flavour of the morning, it wafts across the compound perceptibly. Outside, hundreds of women sit on gunny sacks under a thin cotton canopy. It is 45 degrees and blisteringly hot. Not a fan in sight.

The children run about with great abandon, mercifully gifted with amnesia... I put my arms around one woman who is weeping and 20 others just want a hug, to be comforted even if I can't offer them hope, justice, money, freedom."

Menon went round the camps and was alarmed at what she saw: "The good intentions of the managers notwithstanding, it is sheer bedlam in the camps. The women sit around the whole day under the shamianas, or out in the open in some camps, the kids run wild and the men hang around in sullen groups. Yet, despite the nightmarish conditions in the camps, the prospect of their closure is even more terrible. These are people who have lost everything – homes, breadwinners, jobs, possessions. If they don't get attacked by a hostile neighbour they will perish from sheer want. The question each one asks is, 'where will we go from here'?"[11]

Pankaj Shankar, the well-known film maker, has made an exhaustive film on the riots; it starts with the caption: "As you watch this film, someone is being set on fire in the name of faith." It has captured the hideous face of communal conflict at its worst – burnt houses, looted shops, charred bodies of victims and testimonies of four-year-old children who saw with their own eyes their mothers and sisters being raped and then burnt. Shankar, who had gone to Gujarat to film the Gujarat riots for Channel 4, said: "Initially it was to be a film on the riots for commercial use. But when I was assaulted by the police for the first time there for trying to report the truth and also after seeing the hideous face of crime on the pretext of

religious faith, I could not help but decide to dedicate the film to the victims of riots."

He took over a month and a half to make the film, moving through the villages of Modana, Himmatnagar and Sabarkhana, where destroyed properties, corpses and charred bodies stood testimony to the crimes committed. "One Muslim lady in the film asks '*kya sarkar sirf apke liye hai, hamara liye nahi kyun ki hum Muslim hain*?'. This haunted me for a long time. And that is when the question came to my head whether I should support the Hindus who helped Muslims during the riots or whether I am on the side of Hindus who spearheaded the riots. In several villages I saw a message *Yeh gaon Hindu rashtra hai. Agar muslimon ko rehna hai to unhe teen cheesen manna hai – masjid nahi bana sakenge, azaan nahi denge aur daari nahi rakhenge*."

Meanwhile, renowned filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, who has also been a witness to riots during his frequent visits there in the first two months of the genocide also returned from Gujarat and was present at the film show. He said: "I want all the Muslims in India not to confuse Hindus of Gujarat who carried out the carnage against them, with the secular character of India. The main evil is not done by people of the carnage but by people like us who are quiet even after that. We are solely responsible for the genocide in Gujarat because we aren't stopping it. Indifference and apathy on our side is responsible for this genocide."[12]

Even after the passage of three months Muslim refugees in the relief camps were frightened to return to their homes; the

communal Hindus had made it clear that in case they came back, they would meet the same fate as before. In the camps the conditions continued to be awful; water and food were contaminated; many of them had caught diseases, which could not be attended to because there were insufficient number of doctors or medicines available. Hundreds of babies were born in the camps, but many died because of lack of supply of milk and due to severe heat. As for men and women, many of them had become mentally ill; they suffered from depression, pains, acute vomiting and dizziness. Women who were raped and children who were attacked, relived the nightmares of seeing the brutal killings of their fathers, mothers, sisters and brothers; they could no longer behave normally. They were in a state of helplessness and despair; this gave rise to severe trauma and anger in them. The living felt that dying was preferable; not many were there to wipe their tears and rebuild their confidence. They had lost the zest for living; their existence had become meaningless. They lived waiting to die.

Even after the lapse of four months, the conditions in the camps continued to be most deplorable. The former Foreign Secretary, Muchkund Dubey and the noted social activist, Syeda Hameed who visited some of these camps were horrified at what they saw: "Conditions in the camps are abysmal. In Baqar Shah Roza, people are living, eating, sleeping and defecating under the pouring rains. Shelters in the form of plastic sheet roofing have been provided mostly by NGOs such as CARE and Action Aid. With the heavy downpour,

the camp sites are inundated with rain water due to bad drainage. Rainwater running over the mud and filth, has turned parts of the camps into dirty lakes in which we found scores of children splashing and playing at the risk of contracting water borne diseases."[13] They were brought from one hell and put into another.

All the visitors, Indians or foreigners who visited these camps have told the same sordid tales; the agony and the misery of the victims went on increasing as time passed. Hence Harsh Mander, the bureaucrat who resigned because he could not bear to witness the inhumanity being committed all around him, asked some pertinent questions: "Is it that we are too busy or frightened or prejudiced to reach out and heal? In this vast land, can the governments and the people not find the moral and financial resources to assuage the agony of tens of thousands of innocent women and men, girls and boys, utterly traumatized and rendered destitute? Can we together rebuild not only their shelters and livelihoods but also their trust, spirit and hope? Is the suffering of some people less important because they are children of a lesser god? Or is it that we have lost our capacity to care?"[14]

4

Fascist Trends

The scorching in Godhra and the subsequent carnage in some areas in Gujarat was undoubtedly the work of the fanatical elements of both the communities; the jihadis supported the Ghanchis in Godhra and the communal Hindus whose religious frenzy was whipped up against the Muslims in Gujarat were with the Hindu goons who perpetrated the genocide. But the danger to the future of our polity comes more from the indoctrination of young Hindus who have been told to hate Muslims. Their rage is alarming. The Muslim fanatics destroy lives but the Hindu fanatics have the power to damage the democratic and secular base of our Republic.

One of our greatest political scientists, Rajni Kothari who known for his sober analysis of political developments, has warned in an article in *Hindustan Times* that, "the spread of communal riots in Gujarat was not going to be confined to that state only or contained within it". He explained: "For the

reality is that what has started in Gujarat is a phenomenon that has nationwide implications; indeed international implications as well... In fact, the global reaction is not limited to countries owing loyalty to Islam as was recently found in the highly troubled responses of the EU and various countries that have on the whole been well disposed to India. They all see in the attack on Muslims in India, an issue which can no longer be called an 'internal matter' but has large global implications both in respect of human rights and the growth of a dangerous ideology. They all point to the grave danger of large-scale 'ethnic cleansing', which could well endanger the lives of thousands, if not millions of people."

Kothari drew attention to the fact that human rights advocates saw the growth of a dangerous onslaught against not just one community but the whole secular and democratic ethos of the country. He added: "This has been further accentuated by the consequences in India which cut across national boundaries and can be used by Pakistan in which the threat to 'Muslims' can be highlighted... The result is a dangerous polarization which goes far beyond Gujarat and could take on a national character. The fact that highly educated Muslims living in cosmopolitan societies are beginning to feel that the attack is aimed at them, could well oust them from their present habitats and shake their confidence in a pluralistic India -- thereby pushing them to a dangerous communal space."

Kothari therefore warns: "The more such a divide engulfs the social fabric, the more one is up against the startling

conclusion that while the Sangh parivar swears by nationalism, it is really the pernicious Two-Nation theory that it subscribes to... Once this happens there will be no room for genuinely secular forces who would fight and struggle for democratic and secular values and ideologies..."[1]

Amulya Ganguli has been more forthright in his assessment of the danger that India faces; he has expressed his apprehensions more specifically: "It is salutary to remember that immediately after securing an absolute majority in Gujarat, the saffron camp went quickly to work to exacerbate communal tension. At that time, its target was the Christian community. But the elaborate paraphernalia of a free society — the judiciary, human rights and minority commissions, the media, NGOs, etc. — ensured that the fire did not burn out of control. During the latest outbreak, the ruling party again acted exactly as a fascist outfit would — issue orders 'restraining' the police and not the rioters, punish those officials who acted impartially, discriminate in the matter of providing relief, etc. In addition, by appointing a retired judge to probe the riots whose impartiality is under a cloud."[2]

Arjun Sengupta, the eminent economist, in a thought-provoking contribution to a national daily, has after analysing the horror of the torching of the *kar sevaks* — men, women and children and the holocaust that followed, asked the question: "The time has come to analyse what has gone wrong. Why did we not see the writing on the wall? Why were we all lulled into silence and inaction, hoping somehow the spectre

that is haunting India will go away?" He then describes the spectre as "one of rising fascism, taking the garb of religious revival or Hindutva. Fascism had wrecked Europe through war and destruction, pogroms and the holocaust, throwing up leaders like Mussolini and Hitler, Salazar and Franco and many smaller leaders heading bands of youths and volunteers, almost like the RSS and VHP cadres in India. The analogy does not end there. A look at history will bring out clearly how the Hindutva brigade closely resembles the Red Shirts and Nazi brigades."[3] Sengupta explains that there is no one model of fascism; it took on different roles in different countries over different decades. But there is one characteristic which is common to all: the method of their capturing power and then exercising that power to achieve their objective of imposing their brand of cultural domination. Once they gained that power, they could not be dislodged. They rig elections; they dismantle democratic institutions.

Eric Hobsbawm in his book: *The Age of Extremes, A History of the World, 1914-1991*, stresses the similarities between the rise and expansion of fascism in Europe and the Hindutva movement of the last few years in India. He writes: "Fascism in Europe of all varieties was fundamentally conservative, anti-liberal and authoritarian. The major difference between the fascist and the non-fascist Right was that fascism existed by mobilizing masses from below... Fascists were the revolutionaries of counter-revolution. To mobilize these masses, the fascists appealed to building up a consciousness of solidarity among them, based on ultra-nationalism, glorifying traditional

and a distant past and a cult of hatred against a target group to heighten their own sense of identify. Added to that was the practice of street violence by an organized group of volunteers subject to discipline and inspired by a cult of revenge. Ultra-nationalism of the fascists was linked to hatred against the foreigners and immigrants, which included in small localities, immigrants from outside who were held to be responsible for all the ills afflicting the people."

Glorified traditionalism has also found expression in "the rhetoric of a return to the traditional past" and "the past to which they appealed was an artefact. Their traditions were invented". There was also the stress on "traditional values" and "denunciation of liberal emancipation — women should stay at home and bear a great many children — and they distrusted the corroding influences of modern culture, especially the modernist arts". The hatred for some target groups — mainly, but not exclusively, the Jews — was the cementing factor in that ideology which justified ethnic cleansing and genocide in those countries. Sengupta comments: "All these sound so familiar in India. Concentrating on the Jews at that time came in handy because of a rather long and persistent anti-semitism in Europe. In our country it could be the Muslims or even the Christians if public perception could be easily swayed. The purpose would be to strengthen the identity and solidarity of the other groups that excluded them, and also to strike terror in the hearts of the target groups and of anybody who could be seen as sympathetic or associated with them."

To Hobsbawm, fascism in 20th century Europe was "the combination of conservative values, the techniques of mass democracy and an innovative ideology of irrationalist savagery". History repeats itself, warns Sengupta, though not exactly in the same form but often with striking similarity of the process of how things happen. He remarks: "We may not end up with a Mussolini or a Hitler, but we may witness the evolution of a very similar process of history of growing fascism that could end up with many little Mussolinis manipulating populism and communal hatred. One lesson that the history of these sordid years in Europe teaches us is that if the growth of fascism is not resisted and fought at the very beginning, it inexorably engulfs the whole society in a few years."[4]

Arundhati Roy agreed with Arjun Sengupta and others and mentioned specific apprehensions: "Whipping up communal hatred is part of the mandate of the Sangh parivar. It has been planned for *years*. It has been injecting a slow-release poison directly into civil society's bloodstream. Hundreds of RSS shakhas and Saraswati shishu mandirs across the country have been indoctrinating thousands of children and young people, stunting their minds with religious hatred and falsified history. They're no different from, and no less dangerous than, the madrasas all over Pakistan and Afghanistan which spawned the Taliban. In states like Gujarat, the police, the administration, and the political cadres at every level have been systematically penetrated. It has huge popular appeal, which it would be foolish to underestimate or

misunderstand. The whole enterprise has a formidable religious, ideological, political, and administrative underpinning. This kind of power, this kind of reach, can only be achieved with State backing…"

She is equally apprehensive of the training, for instance, that was being given in madrasas, the Muslim equivalent of hothouses cultivating religious hatred, which had been funded by foreign sources. According to her, they provide the perfect foil for communal Hindus "to dance their dance of mass paranoia and hatred". Disgusted with the current state of affairs, Roy asks: "Why not dispense with the legal system, the Constitution, the press – the whole shebang – morality *itself*, why not chuck it and put everything up for a vote?" She mocks at the way opinion polls were organized to test public opinion about calamities. She would not be surprised if genocides became the subject of opinion polls and receive popular endorsement; or mass areas were used for promoting marketing campaigns. She predicted in horror: "Fascism firm footprint has appeared in India. Let's mark the date: Spring, 2002…"

Roy maintains that nationalism neatly dovetails into fascism and has been "in all its many avatars – socialist, capitalist and fascist … at the root of almost all the genocides of the 20th century." She further argues that "the incipient, creeping fascism of the past few years has been groomed by many of our 'democratic' institutions. Everyone has flirted with it – Parliament, the press, the police, the administration, and the public. Even 'secularists' have been guilty of helping to create

the right climate. Each time you defend the right of an institution, any institution (including the Supreme Court), to exercise unfettered, unaccountable powers that must never be challenged, you move towards fascism."

She adds: "Fascism is also about the slow, steady infiltration of all the instruments of state power. It's about the slow erosion of civil liberties, about unspectacular day-to-day injustices... It means fighting to win back the minds and hearts of people... It means keeping an eagle eye on public institutions and demanding accountability. It means putting your ear to the ground and listening to the whispering of the truly powerless... These levels of rage and hatred cannot be contained, cannot be expected to subside, with public censure and denunciation. Hymns of brotherhood and love are great, but not enough..."

Arundhati blames every political party in India which "has tilled the marrow of our secular parliamentary democracy, mining it for electoral advantage. Like termites excavating a mound, they've made tunnels and underground passages, undermining the meaning of 'secular', until it has just become an empty shell that's about to implode. Their tilling has weakened the foundations of the structure that connects the Constitution, Parliament and the courts of law – the configuration of checks and balances that forms the backbone of a parliamentary democracy".

Roy does not spare the people whom she holds no less responsible for it; she says, "it's futile to go on blaming politicians and demanding from them a morality they're incapable of.

There's something pitiable about a people that constantly bemoans its leaders. If they've let us down, it's only because we've allowed them to. It could be argued that civil society has failed its leaders as much as leaders have failed civil society... But politicians' exploitation of communal divides is by no means the only reason that fascism has arrived on our shores... One hundred and thirty million Muslims live in India. Hindu fascists regard them as legitimate prey".[5]

Muslims have been the target of the communal Hindus ever since the advent of the British; their scholars and historians have dug chronicles of Middle Ages which were written more to please the rulers than to record the facts and were used to prejudice the Hindus against Islam and the Muslims. The process was started during the time of the rule of the East India Company and soon after Calcutta was chosen as the first capital of the Raj. The Bengali babus eagerly cherished whatever was dished out to them by the new masters; Bengali literature bristles with hatred of Muslims which so pleased the British that the babus became their favourites. In a sense, the seeds of a fascist mindset were sown in India during the earliest stage of the British rule.

M.J. Akbar in his much acclaimed seminal book: *The Shade of Swords* points out how popular novelists of Bengal, from Bankim Chandra Chatterji onwards drew their inspiration from the hatred that they generated against "the raw brutes like Muslims". He refers to Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, who discussed the *Bartaman Hindu-Mussalman Samasya* (The

Present Hindu-Muslim Problem) in a speech to the Bengal Provincial Conference in 1926; it was later printed in *Hindu Sangha*. Its premise was that Hindu-Muslim unity, particularly of the kind fostered by Mahatma Gandhi, was a dangerous illusion, as 'battles for a false cause can never be won'. The two communities had irreconcilable political aspirations, Chattopadhyay said, and Muslims were hypocritical when they sought the support of Hindus for their own ends. "The truth is that if Muslims ever say they want to unite with the Hindus, there is no greater hoax. The Muslims came to India to plunder it, not to establish a kingdom".

Akbar continues: "Facts were irrelevant to such analysis; prejudice never too far away." He points out how the Hindus believed that Muslims were not satisfied merely with looting, they destroyed temples, they demolished idols, they raped women. The insult to other religions and the injury to humanity were unimaginable. Even when they became kings they could not liberate themselves from these loathsome desires. Such Hindus have not spared even emperor Akbar; they said that he "was no better than notorious emperors like Aurangzeb". In fact the Hindus were convinced that to the Muslims "the destruction of temples was on par with rape of women". Muslims would never attain the culture that Hindus possessed; they were basically uncivilized.

M.J. reproduces the following quote from Saratchandra Chattopadhyay: "But if the essence of learning is width of the mind and culture of the heart, then there is no comparison

between the two communities... Unity can only be realized among equals... A thousand years has not been enough time, nor will another millennium suffice... 'Hindu-Muslim unity' is a bombastic phrase... We must sacrifice this illusion."

Akbar gives a graphic description of how Bengalis had developed strong aversion to the Muslims; they were of the opinion that the Muslims lacked culture. And therefore they had become "barbaric, brutal, fanatic, and rapist. There was no difference between the poor and the rich Muslim, both were barbaric, just as high culture was shared by all Hindus, irrespective of their class or wealth". The Bengali Hindus were convinced that "cruelty was synonymous with Islam". According to them all that "the passive Hindus do is to compile lists of all instances of cruelty, oppressiveness and hostility towards us" and all we ever say to the Muslims is this — 'You have killed us, you have broken our idols and kidnapped our women. In this you have been very unjust and have caused us great pain. We cannot continue to live like this.' Do we ever say more than this, or do more than this?" These Hindus ask and boldly declare: "Hindustan is the homeland of the Hindus. Therefore it is the duty of the Hindus alone to free this nation from the chains of servitude. Muslims look towards Turkey and Arabia, their hearts are not in India."[6]

The anti-Muslim trend in Bengali literature was strong and widespread; it was successfully indoctrinated among the Hindus by the British historians; later on it also impacted the writers in other states like Maharashtra, U.P. and Bihar. They also

voiced the same sentiments against the Muslims. It was to some extent countered by Ranade, Gandhi and Nehru, who wrote eloquently on the benefits of the Muslim contribution to India. In fact it was pioneered even earlier by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and carried forward by the Tagores, father and son. The outstanding exponents of communal harmony then were Aurbindo Bose, Swami Vivekananda and the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore sang of national integration so melodiously that Hindu communalism, with its anti-Muslim overtone was considerably diluted and even discarded in Bengal thereafter; Tagore's poem "On the shores of Bharat" is the best answer to the opponents of Hindu-Muslim unity:

On the shores of Bharat,
Where men of all races have come together,
Awake, O my Mind!
Standing here with outstretched arms,
I send my salutations to the God of Humanity,
And in solemn chant sing His praises.
At whose call no one knows,
Came floating streams of men
And merged into the sea of Bharat.
The Aryan, the non-Aryan, the Dravidian,
The Huns, the Pathans and the Moghuls –
They all have merged here into one body.

Despite these efforts, the anti-Muslim sentiment did not die; it continued to be fostered by the communal Hindus who

went on to rouse the rage in various ways against the Muslims. It remained dormant during the freedom struggle when communal harmony was the dominant theme; even after Partition it could not be revived as forcefully as the communal Hindus wanted because Nehru as Prime Minister managed to thwart it. His successors in office were unable to keep up the momentum; they tried to reinforce but failed to turn the Hindus against going ahead on the anti-Muslim path; their influence increased and its impact began to be felt far and wide. It has now engulfed all shades of Hindus. The Hindu secularists are, therefore, weary of its frightful consequences; they are afraid that it might destroy the very basis of secular democracy.

Girish Mishra says: "Hindu communalism is an exercise in social destructiveness on par with racism, fascism, Nazism, religious fundamentalism and so on". The communal Hindu does not think that his brand of communalism always implies physical violence; but what is worse, it keeps the minorities "intimidated and subdued through words, threats and certain demonstrative actions". To maintain a regular hold on its adherents, Hindu communalism "propagates its ideology, through books, speeches, wall-writings". Its aim is to build up the super psyche of the Hindus and downgrade that of the Muslims who are shown as invaders, plunderers, murderers, and rapists. To support their case, Hindu communalists give comparative examples; they say while a Hindu reveres the cow, a Muslim kills and eats it; while a Hindu worships idols, a Muslim destroys them; while a Hindu faces the East for puja, a

Muslim prostrates towards the West when praying. Their aim is to maintain the divide between the two religious groups so that reconciliation is ruled out.

Girish Mishra elaborates its disastrous effect thus: "Quite often we meet individual Hindu communalists who appear to be suave, soft-spoken, liberal and very amiable. On a personal level, they may have excellent relations with their Muslim neighbours but when they become part of a group, for example, the VHP or Bajrang Dal, their behaviour undergoes a metamorphosis and they become as intolerant and cruel as their ideology demands. Thus communalism is a group phenomenon in the sense that it reflects the attitude of one group towards another"[7]. When it is adopted by the majority community then there is the danger that it can lead to fascism. Nehru cautioned against this danger repeatedly in his speeches.

M.S. Golwalker, the ideologue of RSS, was an admirer of Hitler's Germany. He wrote: "German race pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by purging the country of the semitic race – the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. *Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.*"[8]

This was written before the outbreak of World War II (1939-45) when the diabolical nature of the German Fuehrer and his Nazi Germany was for the first time revealed to the

world. Until then many intellectuals and political leaders in the West had eulogized Hitler for having transformed a defeated and depressed people into a disciplined nation. They forgot to notice that this was accomplished in a most ruthless manner, singling out a particular race or community as the enemy and exterminating it. Many Hindu intellectuals have now come forward to warn the people that if the prevailing communal rage is not checked, India may take to the fascist path; this may not happen immediately but the signs do point in that direction. They have pointed out that ethnic and economic cleansing of Indian Muslims can never bring lasting prosperity to the nation.

As Anita Pratap has expressed in her inimitable style: "The unalterable truth is that nowhere has fascism and ultra-nationalism worked – not in Germany, not in Italy, not in Sri Lanka. Such misguided policies have wreaked havoc for decades, bankrupting the nation and robbing the future of entire generations of both the minority and majority communities. That's the kind of history we don't want repeated in India. Along the way, some of us may have lost our dreams. But this is a nightmare worth fighting against."[9]

5

Hindu Grievances

What happened in Gujarat recently resulting in the death and destruction of thousands of innocent and helpless Indians has no doubt besmirched the fair name of India and cast a shadow on our democratic and secular polity. However I remain an optimist though not in the same measure as before. Communal harmony has no doubt been damaged beyond repair; our humanistic values are being torn to shreds. Even so, the fact that India survived the horrors of Partition and refused to become a Hindu rashtra, despite the relentless provocation from Pakistan, keeps my hopes alive; a single instance of genocide cannot destroy the basis of broad humanism which has been the basis of our existence for thousands of years. It has sustained our civilization through all the stresses and stains of the times. The poet Iqbal rightly pointed out:

Iran-o-Misr-o Ruma sab mit gaye jahaan-se
Abtak magar hai baaqi, naamo-nishaan hamaara

Kuch baat hai kay hasti mit-ti nahi hamaari
Sadyon rahaa hai dushman daur-i-zamaan hamaara.

All the ancient civilizations of the past,
They are dead, gone and no longer heard of;
May it be Iran, Egypt, Greece or Rome.
But despite the forces working against us,
There is something indestructible in us
Which refuses to let our existence be erased.

Max Mueller said it with a personal touch: "If I were to ask myself from what literature we here in Europe — who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of the Greeks and the Romans and of one Semitic race, the Jewish — may draw the corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive more universal, in fact more truly human a life, not for this life alone but a transfigured and eternal life, again I should point to India."[1]

Likewise India can never be fascist as happened in Germany, Italy or Spain; some instances may indeed create a sense of dismay among us; but eventually our past itself will safeguard both our present and our future. There are, no doubt, certain signs pointing in the opposite direction, which we cannot ignore. They pertain to the developments in the short time since Partition and also to those which have a certain historical and religious bearing in the long term.

For over fifty years now, I have been fearing the onslaught of the communal Hindus on the Indian Muslims — those who stayed back in India; the hostilities between the two

communities were intensified by the British in order to perpetuate their rule. The various measures they took in pursuance of their divide and rule policy, are too well-known to be repeated here. But more than any other leader it was Jinnah with his pernicious Two-Nation theory who did the greatest harm to Hindu-Muslim relations. The writings of V.D. Savarkar, Lala Lajpat Rai and the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha were no less divisive but their impact was limited; there was hardly any response to it from the Hindus. Gandhi and Nehru had not only diluted their effect but generated a more harmonious atmosphere. Jinnah spoilt it all as I have elaborated in my book: *The Man Who Divided India*. In order to achieve his ambition of carving out a separate homeland for the Muslims, he used words that hurt and left a festering sore on Hindu-Muslim relations. He went on stressing that there was nothing in common between the two communities.

He said: "Hindus and Muslims belong to two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literature. They neither intermarry, nor inter-dine together and indeed they belong to two different civilizations which are based mainly on conflicting ideas and conceptions. Their aspects on life and of life are different. It is quite clear that Hindus and Mussalmans drive their inspiration from different sources of history. They have different epics, their heroes are different, and they have different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and likewise their victories and defeats overlap."[2] Jinnah thus harangued and went on to say that

Hindus worship the cow and Muslims eat it. This was the unkindest cut. He succeeded only in damaging the relations between the two communities to an irreparable extent and got his Pakistan with the terrible aftermath that both Hindus and Muslims had to suffer.

But while he was able, as he claimed, to free two-third of the Muslims in undivided India from what he described as Hindu domination, it was the one-third who had to bear the brunt of his tirade of hate against the Hindus. Gandhi sacrificed his life to preserve Hindu-Muslim unity. Nehru tried his best as Prime Minister to protect Muslims from the rage of the communal Hindus. He made secularism the basis of his governance; his successors, including his daughter pursued it to the extent she could. But the relations between Hindus and Muslims had been so impaired due to the entire struggle for Pakistan and its creation that not much was really achieved in overcoming it. Riots went on recurring; one issue or another was brought to the fore by one side or the other and that caused further alienation between the two.

Politics played havoc; it pitted one community against the other; Muslims failed to realize that despite the rights and guarantees given to them in the Constitution, even democracy worked on the basis of numbers. Hindus constituted 85 percent of the population of divided India; Muslims, only 12; the rest of the minorities, notably Christians and Sikhs, 3 percent. Hindus would thus inevitably be the rulers; they were to be in command of all the sinews of power. It was foolhardiness on

the part of Muslims, misguided by their leaders, to imagine they could confront the Hindus and have their way. They fought on non-issues and brought more and more misery to the ordinary Muslims; every time they exhibited their bravado, it generated a Hindu backlash. Instead of working out compromises with the Hindus, they insisted on demanding their rights which they were unable to obtain.

Some political parties, claiming to be secular, took up the Muslim cause but they could do little to improve their lot. They managed to get their votes but could not afford to displease the Hindus who formed the major vote-bank. Hindus could not get over their prejudices against Muslims; these were endemic to their relationship. To quote Prof Gyanendra Pandey: "Once again, much that has lain dormant for a while has surfaced with a vengeance. Recent outpourings from the Hindu Right-wing work on the basis of a brazen division of India into the civilized (Hindus) and the barbarian (Muslims). The former are said to be educated, rational and 'modern' – or potentially educable, rational, and 'modern'. The latter are declared congenitally incapable of attaining these conditions, and unwilling even to try. The civilized are concerned about the problem of rapid population growth, and attentive to the needs of hygiene, science and medicine. The barbarians choose to live in ghettos, dirty, overcrowded, and unventilated; they multiply like rabbits, and spread filth and disease. For all these reasons, the pronouncement goes, as well as on account of their innate religious bigotry and

aggressiveness, the Muslims are a source of grave danger to society, 'modernity', 'civilization'."[3]

I don't want to go into the politics of the revival of the process of hate by the communal Hindus against the Muslims; it has much to do with vote banks and power game. I am, however, reproducing here the observations of one of the most erudite proponents of Hinduism; Dr. R.S. Misra is the former Professor of Comparative Religion at Benaras Hindu University. He writes: "In the name of secularism, the sovereign state has imposed modern western culture on India in various ways and has deprived the people of their cultural freedom... The Muslim religious leaders show their faith in secularism, *dharma-nirpekshata* only because it has given them special privileges which are denied to the Hindus... The special status given to Kashmir under Article 370 has eventually resulted in making the Hindus of that state refugees in their own county..."

Dr. Misra dilates further on his charge of appeasement of Muslims: "But things have gone too far now. Hinduism cannot afford to keep itself under subjection to secularism or dharma-nirpekshata any longer... The civil law of our secular State is applicable to all the communities of the country excepting the community of Muslims. How far the Muslim community has been benefited by it is a different matter altogether. But it has undoubtedly given immense satisfaction and pleasure to Muslim religious leadership which is based on politics. The sovereign state of India lost its real secular character the day it retained the Muslim Personal law and failed to formulate a

common civil code of personal laws applicable to all the citizens of the country in a uniform way. This arbitrary and unjust application of secularism by the state has created an impregnable barrier in the way of unity and national integration..."[4]

Dr. Misra proceeds to give certain specific examples: "A new Hindu Code was enacted and introduced but the Muslim Personal law was left untouched. The *Smritis* that had governed the secular and religious life of the Hindus down the ages were thrown overboard, but the Shariah that governed the life of the Muslims in the same way was not set aside. It was allowed to operate in the same way on the Muslim community in the post-independence era as it had done till then... By retaining the Muslim Personal Law governed by the *Shariat*, the secular state of India gave free scope and full freedom to Muslim leadership and its religious organizations to keep their iron grip on the Muslim population and hold supreme authority over it as before. The state can exercise no authority over the Muslims in this respect. The law of monogamy is obligatory on all the people of India excepting the community of Muslims. The Constitution of the secular state of India has granted the Muslim community freedom to enjoy the special privilege of polygamy under the Muslim Personal Law... it shows great concern and with full justification for the freedom and emancipation of Hindu women. But it sees no injustice in turning its back on the Muslim women and keeping itself quite unconcerned with

their fate and welfare. It has set aside the judgements of the courts, even of the Supreme Court on the issues concerning the lot of Muslim women through legislation... (thus) Muslim religious organizations (have succeeded) by keeping intact and even strengthening their fundamentalist character..."[5]

Dr. Misra has voiced the reaction of most Hindus to the opposition of the Muslims to the enactment of the Common civil code. I agree with him that their agitation to it is both misconceived and misplaced. But the issue is not as simple as Dr. Sharma has made out; it is also politically motivated. True, the enactment is a directive principle of the Constitution but there are many other directives about which there has been no such insistence. Muslim leaders, without realizing the difficulties involved in enacting such a code, have played into the hands of their opponents by articulating their opposition to it. They have not bothered to study the history of the unification of the Hindu Code Bill, which created the biggest controversy among Hindus.

Prime Minister Nehru appointed two expert committees to prepare a report reflecting the views of different schools relating to succession, inheritance, marriage, divorce, adoption and guardianship among Hindus and work out some kind of consensus. On the basis of the recommendations of these committees the then Law Minister, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, prepared a comprehensive bill, codifying all the Hindu laws and moved it in the provisional Parliament in 1948; but right from the start it faced stiff opposition. Even President Prasad

expressed his unhappiness at its enactment. Amendments after amendments were moved and some members even resorted to filibustering to frustrate its passage. It took days for even the preliminary clauses to be passed. Nehru realized the futility of going ahead and shelved the measure. Despite the fact that the Congress was in an overwhelming majority, the Prime Minister was unable to win over the MPs to his way of reformist thinking. Many of them openly told him that to support it would hurt their religious sensibilities. He gave up the idea and did nothing until 1950, when on the advice of Dr Ambedkar he decided to split the comprehensive Bill into separate legislative measures and mollify the Opposition by initiating reforms piecemeal.

The first piece of legislation brought before the provisional Parliament was the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Bill. It did not propose any revolutionary change in the existing law; it only sought to streamline the provision for judicial separation between couples. Still it had to be referred to a joint select committee of the two Houses, which suggested some amendments and was passed after a number of compromises were agreed to by the government. This was followed by the Hindu Succession Bill, which also got stalled due to a series of objections from different quarters. The result was that the provisions relating to *mitakshara,* the joint family, which governed more than 80 per cent of the Hindus, were dropped. This deprived inheritance to women, as under it only men were entitled to inherit ancestral property. Women could not

be allowed, as of right, even to live in the 'dwelling houses' of their ancestors. This was far from the reforms Nehru had aimed at. It struck at the root of women's emancipation. The Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Bill did not create much controversy and was passed without any difficulty; it enabled women also to adopt male children and the adoption of female children was made legal.

Such were the problems faced by the sponsors in the passage of the Hindu Code Bill; it will be much more difficult to incorporate and adjust all personal laws of different communities under a common civil code. Once the process begins, it will cause unprecedented religious upheaval not only among religious minorities but also among large sections of the majority Hindu community, which is divided and subdivided into several castes and sub-castes, each with its peculiar rites and customs, rules and regulations. Experience also shows that laws do not reform societies. Child marriages take place despite the Sharda Act and dowry persists despite strict penal provisions. Both Hindus and Muslims are in need of effective reforms in their Personal Laws; sincere legislative effort must be made in that direction especially among the Muslims. That will have to be the first step; then the question of common civil code can be considered. Muslims should not oppose something without knowing what it will be.

However the hope that a common civil code will bring about all round uniformity among the citizens, disregarding the Personal Laws of various communities and castes is wishful

thinking; before its enactment there will be many hurdles to go through. The history of the opposition to the enactment of Hindu code is a pointer. At the inauguration of the Deen Dayal Institute in New Delhi on August 20, 1972, Guru Golwalker expressed his strong reservation about it as can be seen from his replies to questions put to him by a correspondent of *Motherland* (now defunct), the one-time organ of the Jana Sangh:

Q. Don't you consider a uniform civil code necessary for the furtherance of national integration?

A. No, I don't think so. You and many others will be surprised to hear it, but this is my opinion and I should express the truth the way I see it... It is not that I object to a uniform civil code as such. But at the same time it must be borne in mind that something cannot become desirable only because it is mentioned in the Constitution.

Q. Don't you think that Muslims are opposing the uniform civil code just to maintain their identity and individuality?

A. I have no grievance against any section, community or fraternity desiring to maintain its identity or individuality, provided that this 'identity' is not a hurdle in the way of sentiments for patriotism... So long as Muslims love this country and its culture we welcome their way of life.

Q. Will it be right to permit Muslim women to remain in purdah and put up with polygamy?

A. Muslims should be given an opportunity to give up their archaic laws. If they themselves conclude that polygamy

is not good for them, I will be very happy. But I will not like to impose my views on them.

The agitation mounted by the Muslims, at the behest of some of their misguided leaders, against the judgement of the Supreme Court in the Shah Bano case was not justified; the methods used were most objectionable, which had caused a lot of resentment among a large number of responsible citizens. The language used against the judges, for instance, by Z.R. Ansari, a minister in the government of Rajiv Gandhi was most objectionable. The allegation by some of the Ulama that the judgement violated the relevant provision of the Shariah was also baseless; it was also wrong on Rajiv Gandhi's part to have given in to pressure from these Muslims and have the Constitution amended and a new law enacted to undo the alleged wrong; it claimed to provide better maintenance to divorced Muslim women but in practice it did exactly the opposite; it has made divorce much easier for men because maintenance for divorced wives was reduced; hundreds of young Muslim women, divorced in consequence of the new law, have been thrown on the streets. Wakf Boards were to look after them; but none came forward. Moosa Raza, a retired top bureaucrat, has pointed out in his article in *The Indian Express* that the new law had been thrown out by the Supreme Court. Criticizing in bitter terms the agitation on the Shah Banoo case, Javed Iqbal, the son of Allama Iqbal and the former Chief Justice of Pakistan has remarked: "To fight a legal battle on a legal issue outside the court and that too in a foolish

manner gives the impression to others that Muslims have no regard for the sanctity of the Court's decision. This is unwise. It amounts to Muslims committing political and calculated suicide." The worst part of this unfortunate episode was the Hindu reaction against the Muslims; they were furious that even now Muslims could get the Constitution amended for a wrong objective. Historians are agreed that this was the major cause, which provoked the Rath Yatra, and gave rise to the Ramjanmabhoomi movement which culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

Prof. Sharma has put the case against Muslims and their appeasement soberly and without much rancour; but that is not the case as far as the advocates of Hindu rashtra are concerned. They have denounced them with no holds barred and demanded the establishment of Hindu rashtra as a counter to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan; they want that Muslims should be shown their proper place in India. This has been put eloquently by Prof. Gyanendra Pandey in the book *Hindus and Others* which he has so ably edited. In his introduction to it he mentions how Hindu communalists consider "every Muslim as fanatical, licentious and aggressive".

Prof. Pandey comments: "It is a faithful echo of a line strongly plied by British and French imperialism in the late-nineteenth century, and by their American successor in the late twentieth. Every Muslim in India is, moreover, a foreigner (*Babur ki aulad*, the 'progeny of Babur' is the collective designation most commonly employed, in utter disregard of

the parallel argument – also often made by Hindu propagandists – that the majority of Muslims in the subcontinent came from the lowest castes and classes, ignorant and innocent, who were forcibly converted to Islam). All Indian Muslims become 'foreigners' and of course, 'trouble-makers'." Hindu communalists, according to the professor, make no bones about their objective; they insist that "once Pakistan has been established, why should Muslims stay on here?" They contend 'All Muslims are at heart Pakistanis: Why else do they support Pakistan in cricket?' Furthermore, "all Muslims are aggressive; they manufacture bombs and accumulate arms. If you examine the matter (you will find that) every riot is started by them."

"The politics of Hindu self-assertion," writes Prof. Pandey, "has reached a new militant pitch over the last few years; it speaks in the name of Hindu rights and Hindu nationalism. On Ayodhya, for example, they argue: 'If we cannot build a temple in our own country, at the birthplace of our most popular deity, where can we build? And if we cannot build even a temple in our own land, in what sense are we free? This pseudo-secular Raj is worse than the British Raj (in the treatment that it metes out to Hindus)'... They have coined "a variety of new slogans: '*Garva se kaho ham Hindu hain*' (Declare with pride that we are Hindus); '*Hindu jaaga, desh jaagega*' (With the Hindu awakening, the nation awakes). And further: 'The Hindus have been tolerant for far too long; they are still too timid.' Or, alternatively: 'The need of the hour is not tolerance but courage.' These slogans derive a great deal

of their force from the simultaneous appeal to nationalism and to Ram bhakti. To these persons a Muslim is an enemy, who has to be fought and banished. Prof. Pandey explains its repercussions: "The message of 'nationalism' and the message of 'religion' has assumed a particularly blood-curdling form in the propaganda generated in Ayodhya in the 1980s and early 90s. One of the panels in the VHP showroom adjacent to the Babri Masjid, for instance, described the task of a Hindu youth now and in the future, in the following terms:

Kahin na phir ham se chhin jaaye,
Ramjanmabhoomi hamaari.
Uttho, chunauti ko sweekaro—
Yuvakon aaj hamaari baari.
Mitado vishva se in dushton ko,
Banen [bano] jagat ke vishva vijeta

Beware, lest our Ramjanmabhoomi
Is once again seized from us.
Arise! Accept the challenge
Young men! It is our turn today.
Wipe out these tyrants from the world
And become world-conquerors ...

Likewise an audio-cassette sold in Ayodhya, and all over northern India blares out the following poisonous message:

Bharat mein Babur bahut hain—
Unko khatm karne ka intezaam kar deejiye.
Basne na paayen Ram-drohiyon ki bastiyaan—
Aisi bastiyon ko shamshaan kar deejiye.

There are too many Baburs in India—
Arrange to wipe them out.
We want no habitations of the enemies of Ram—
Turn all such habitations
into burning – ghats, crematoria…

"Today the (primary) issue is not the building of the temple," declared the eighty-year-old 'sadhu', Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das, one of the central figures in the Ramjanmabhoomi 'liberation' movement. "they have taken 1,500 of my children. I want 15,000 in return. The question of building the temple will be taken up then." Not 15,000 policemen or officials or politicians: 15,000 Muslim 'children', in return for 1,500 of 'our own'…

"The protagonists of Hindutva are determined that 'barbarians' must be 'civilized'. In India as elsewhere, the 'dreaded' Muslim must be 'disarmed' by disenfranchisement, deculturization, or any other means to hand. At the very least, 'the Muslims', if they are to stay on in India, must become 'Indian' in dress and manner: adopt 'our' names, 'our' language, 'our' clothes, 'our' food habits (why not 'our' religion too?). In a word, if they wish to live in India, they must learn to live like 'us'. '*Hindustan mein rahna hai to hamse milkar rahna hoga*' (If you wish to live in Hindustan, you will have to learn to live like us.) '*Hindustan mein rahna hai to Bande-Mataram kahna hoga*'. If you wish to live in Hindustan, you will have to raise the slogan, *Bande Mataram* (Victory to the Mother). 'Live like us' or face annihilation: '*Babur ki santaan – jaao Pakistan ya Qabrastan*' Children of Babur! Go to Pakistan or the grave,

a slogan that appears to have been taken literally by large sections of the police and the local Hindu population in several places in India."[6]

Babur has been unjustly maligned for the alleged destruction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the construction in its place of a mosque which has been wrongly described as Babri Masjid. The emperor had nothing to do with either of the two operations. There is no mention of such an important fact in his memoirs; nor is such an act of destruction in consonance with the will that he had left for his son and successor Humayun, in which he had specifically advised him that he should not "damage the places of worship and temples which fall within the boundaries of our rule."

The mosque was built by one of his generals, Mir Baqi who was a Shia; Babur was a Sunni. Mir Baqi had built it for the exclusive use of Shias; Sunnis, as a rule, don't pray in Shia mosques and vice versa. When a controversy about the Ramjanmabhoomi was raised in 1988, the General Secretary of the All-India Shia Conference affirmed in a press statement that it was a Shia mosque and the Shias had no objection to its relocation in a nearby village which was the birth place of Mir Baqi. They also got a fatwa issued by the Shaikhul Imam of Najaf, the highest religious authority of the Shias, to the same effect. But as the Sunnis had meanwhile taken over the mosque and named it Babri Masjid, the matter assumed a different connotation. The rest is history. To call the Indian Muslims *Babur ki Aulad* is, indeed, absurd; neither the emperor would have ever owned it nor will Indian Muslims ever accept it.

6

Historical Distortions

Much of the alienation between Hindus and Muslims took place, as I mentioned earlier, after the advent of the British. Their governors like Sir William Muir and historians like Vincent Smith freely resorted to historical distortions and religious misrepresentations about Muslims and Islam in order to prejudice Hindus against them. This particularly influenced the rising Hindu intellectual class. They were made to believe that most Muslim rulers persecuted Hindus, destroyed their temples and broke their idols. Fanciful versions were given and the number of temples destroyed by Muslim rulers was eventually put at 3000 and above; on their debris, it was further alleged, mosques were built. There is absolutely no basis to the charge; the figure is a concoction of fertile brains which has been refuted by eminent historians such as R.C. Majumdar, the general editor of the eleven-

volume *History of India*, published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan which has been accepted by even the votaries of Hindutva as most authentic.

Muslims first came to India as invaders in 711 when Muhammad bin Qasim invaded Sind; it was a retaliatory action on his part as Raja Dhir refused to pay compensation for the piracy of his ship by the Raja's men. During the rule of these Arabs which was confined to Sind, Hindus were neither persecuted nor was a single temple destroyed.

Then after a lapse of three hundred years, came Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030); he plundered the treasures of Somnath in 1020; this was a pure and simple loot that had nothing to do with Islam. He took away all the gold, diamonds and other precious jewels from the temple to Ghazni. On his way back he conquered Multan but appointed a Hindu governor to administer it. According to K.R. Malkani, Mahmud was "a recent convert from Afghan Savism to Islam... This master brigand was quite a secularist as his Indian coins were struck in Sanskrit and they bore the image of either Lakshmi or Siva's Nandi".

This was followed by the expedition of Muhammad of Ghor (1175-1206). He invaded Multan to protect his Ismaili people; but Prithvijit's army gave him a good fight; he was assisted in his expedition by a Muslim commander Husain Shah. Muhammad's rule was also of short duration. He was overthrown by his slave, Qutb-ud-din Aybak (1206-10) who was said to be a competent ruler. He showed no preference for

the local Muslims and left the Hindus alone. His only interest was to protect his throne.

He was succeeded by Iltutmish (1211-36), who was much troubled by his Forty Amirs. They intrigued against him by inciting the Muslim fundamentalists. They contended that the king's preference for his daughter Razia as his successor as against his son was a sin. Islam, they said, did not sanction the rule of a woman. Despite their opposition, Iltutmish before he died nominated his daughter to the throne; the Forty Amirs, who were supported by the Ulama were furious; they intrigued against Razia. She ruled for just three and half years and was killed. Razia gave full protection to her Hindu subjects, did not allow any discrimination against them and introduced many liberal reforms. In my book: *Razia: Queen of India*, which has been recently reprinted by Oxford University Press as a standard text, there is enough evidence to show that Razia was a fair and just ruler.

Ghiyasuddin Balban (1206-87) was one of the Forty Amirs who succeeded Razia. He was a strong ruler and defied the Ulama by declaring himself as the "vice-regent of God". This was an affront to Islam. He projected himself in the traditions of the ancient kings of Iran. According to the historian Barani, "Balban had no fear of God. All that mattered to him was his own interest regardless of whether it was in consonance with the Shariah or not". He made no distinction between his Hindu and Muslim subjects.

Then came Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316), who spent all his time in consolidating his rule. The Muslim tribesmen who

revolted against him numbering around 30,000, were mercilessly slaughtered by him. When the chief Mufti protested, the king declared: "I don't care what your Shariah prescribes. I do whatever is in the best interest of my rule."[1]

Muhammad Tughlaq (1325-51) was regarded by some as a genius and by others as an eccentric. He planned to conquer the world and came out with many hare-brained schemes, which had little to do with the welfare of his subjects, both Hindus and Muslims. His successor Firuz Tughlaq (1351-88) was, however, a fanatic. He regarded himself as the defender of Islam; he persecuted the Hindus, imposed *jaziya* on them and destroyed their temples. Soon thereafter, Timur (1370-1405) arrived in Delhi like a hurricane and brought with him, to quote the chronicler Badauni, "such famine and pestilence... that the city was utterly ruined and all its inhabitants, without any distinction between Hindus and Muslims, were massacred by him. For two months not a bird moved a wing".[2] Eventually his governor, Khirz Khan, in charge of Multan defeated Timur's men and established his own kingdom under the family name of Sayyids (1414-51). These rulers were incompetent and according to the chronicler Nizamuddin Ahmad, "the affairs of the state grew worse day by day and more and more anarchic and each noble took charge of one place or another at twenty or more krohs from Delhi". As a result, the governor of Lahore Buhlul Khan Lodi (1451-89) took over the kingdom. His successor Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517) became a tool in the hands of the Ulama; he prosecuted the Hindus who rose in revolt against him. His

son, Ibrahim Lodi (1517-26) succeeded him but could not control the deteriorating situation. Two of his generals, Daulat Khan and Alam Khan then invited Babur (1483-1530) to come to Delhi with his army and take over the throne. Babur came, fought the battle of Panipat, overthrew Ibrahim Lodi and established the rule of the Mughals.

The Sultans of this regime were mainly concerned with consolidating their rule; they did not bother about following the Shariah and except Firuz Tughlaq, none of them ill-treated their Hindu subjects. Their main concern was the preservation of their rule. And thus they concentrated on maintaining internal peace and avoiding trouble in their kingdom. They encouraged social contact between Hindus and Muslims which gave rise to the Bhakti movement, the greatest exponents of it being Kabir (1440-1518) and Nanak (1469-1539).

One outcome of the intermingling of the two communities was the birth of a common language known as *Khari-boli* which later developed into Urdu. There was also a literary and cultural renaissance: poetry, music and the arts blossomed across northern India. Governors of provinces became patrons of intercommunal fusion. Zayn al-Abidin's (1420-70) rule in Kashmir was the high watermark of Hindu-Muslim fraternity; it also fostered under the Husayn Shahi dynasty (1493-1539) in Bengal and the Bahmanis (1347-1526) in the Deccan. The Adil Shahis of Bijapur (1490-1686), the Nizam Shahis of Ahmednagar (1490-1600), the Imad Shahis of Berar (1485-1574), the Barid Shahis of Bidar (1492-1619) and the Qutb

Shahis of Golconda (1512-1687) actively encouraged communal harmony by bringing their Hindu and Muslim subjects together on festive occasions.

According to the contemporary chronicler Farishta, "the Sultans ignored canonical law, as expounded by the Ulama and based their system on political expediency and worldly experience". Their treatment of the Hindu subjects was, by and large, humane; they gave full religious liberty to them. They were allowed to worship their idols, blow conches, bathe in the Ganga and the Jamuna and take out religious processions without let or hindrance.

Except for the Khiljis and the Tughlaqs, these sultans were petty rulers; they ruled over small parts of India from Delhi. It is, therefore, incorrect to describe the Delhi Sultanate in the same terms as the Mughal empire. Most of the sultans exercised limited power, struggling to control their subedars who ofter rebelled against their authority and established tiny independent kingdoms of their own. Most of India was, in fact, under the control of Hindu rulers or rajas of one region or the other. They were independent and under no Muslim ruler. There was a common saying:

How Sultan after Sultan with his pomp
Abode his destined hour, and went his way.[3]

To begin with, there was the Arab rule confined only to Sind and Multan; it continued for about two centuries. Stanley Lane-Poole has described it as just 'an episode in the history

of India and Islam, a triumph without results'. Likewise the Ghaznavid rule in the Punjab was an interlude, managed by a Hindu governor, appointed by Mahmud. Even the Ghurides, despite the military exploits of Qutb-ud-din Aybak, could not extend their dominion beyond north India. The only exception was Alauddin Khilji who, according to R.C. Majumdar, "for the first time established Muslim suzerainty over nearly the whole of India."[4] After him it disintegrated until the ruler of another dynasty, Muhammad Tughlaq, expanded his empire up to the farthest end in the south. He ruled for ten years.

Hence the period of effective and comprehensive Muslim rule over India from the seventh to the thirteenth century was barely of thirty years duration. Until the advent of the Mughals, there was only a semblance of Muslim rule, which for almost seven centuries covered a part of India, one dynasty replacing the other and with almost a vacuum from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, when most of India was ruled by various Hindu rajas. It is important to bear this in mind because a wrong impression has been spread among Hindus that for 700 years, from the invasion of Muhammad bin Qasim in 711 to the fall of Ibrahim Lodi in 1526, Muslims ruled over the whole of India, indulging in persecution and oppression of Hindus, destroying their temples, ill-treating their womenfolk and extorting taxes from them. This myth has now been successfully exploded and most historians have accepted it without reservation.

Babur's invasion was at the invitation of both the Muslim nobles and the Hindu rajas who conspired against Ibrahim Lodi. His generals had registered the move but Babur seized the opportunity of conquering new pastures across the Afghan borders. He was a refined and cultured individual who enjoyed the good things of life. His memoirs reflect his liberal and cosmopolitan approach to men and matters. There is only one reference to his visit to Gwalior fort which he described as "wonderful buildings" but found the rooms dark and airless. He also went to see the valley beneath the fort, visited the Jain shrines, where he was aghast to see "the idols... quite naked, without covering the privities... I ordered them, destroyed."

He saw the Hindu temples next and appreciated the beauty of the idols. He did not ever visit Ayodhya; it was his Shia general, Mir Baqi who is said to have destroyed the Ram temple there and built a mosque for the Shias. Babur apparently had no knowledge about it as there is no reference to it in his memoirs. It is, therefore, surprising that Babur should be implicated and maligned in the controversy regarding the Ram temple and the Babri masjid. There was no trace of bigotism in Babur and his will, the last testament to his son Humayun (1508-56), who succeeded him, is a clear refutation of such a charge.

He wrote: "Son, this nation Hindustan has different religions. Thank Allah for giving us this kingdom, we should remove all the differences from our heart and do justice to

each community according to its customs. Avoid cow-slaughter to win over the hearts of the people in the matters of administration. Don't damage the places of worship and temples which fall in the boundaries of our rule. Evolve a method of ruling whereby all the people of the kingdom are happy with the king and the king is happy with the people. Islam can progress by noble deeds and not by terror. Ignore the differences of Shia and Sunni as this is the weakness of Islam; keep the people following different customs integrated into a single whole so that no part of the body of this kingdom becomes diseased." To accuse such an enlightened ruler of the destruction of a temple is travesty of history.

Humayun followed Babur's testament faithfully; he was soon overthrown by one of his generals, Sher Shah Suri (1540-45) who reigned as an enlightened ruler for some years until Humayun was able to reclaim the throne with the military support of Shah Tahmasp of Iran (1524-76). Humayun died soon thereafter by slipping on the stairs of his library.

His twelve-year-old son Akbar (1556-1605) succeeded him. Akbar's fifty-year rule is regarded as the hallmark of liberalism which cemented the relations between Hindus and Muslims as never before. He showed the highest respect to Hindu sentiments and traditions; some of the Ulama in fact called him an enemy of Islam. Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564-1624) carried on a campaign against him. But there are some Hindu communalists who cast aspersions even on his catholicity and greatness as a liberal ruler.

Jehangir (1605-27) succeeded Akbar; he was loved by his subjects for his passion for justice; anyone, Hindu or Muslim, could go to his palace, pull the chain of justice and demand that his grievance be redressed. He took personal interest in every case. He was liberal to the core; he neither built a mosque nor a temple. Shah Jahan (1628-58) ascended the peacock throne after Jehangir; he was a lover of art and architecture; he made no distinction in the treatment of his subjects. Nor did he allow any temple to be destroyed in his kingdom. In fact he encouraged his eldest son, Dara Shikoh (1615-59), whom he had nominated as his successor, to learn Sanskrit and study the Vedas. Dara Shikoh was attracted to mysticism and found much in common between Hinduism and Islam; he elaborated this in his book: *Majma' ul-Bahrayn* (the mingling of two oceans) beautifully. Shah Jahan's best gift to India was the Taj Mahal which is regarded as one of the seven wonders of the world.

Aurangzeb (1658-1707) intrigued against both his father Shah Jahan and his brother Dara Shikoh to grab the throne for himself. He was a puritan in religion and cultivated the Ulama whom he instigated against Dara Shikoh and with their help managed to raise his own force to usurp the throne by getting Dara Shikoh murdered. He also imprisoned Shah Jahan and kept him confined in a fort for seven years contrary to the Quranic injunction which makes it obligatory for a son to look after his parents with honour.

He imposed the rules of Shariah in his empire and levied *jaziya* for the first time in the history of the Mughals on the Hindus. He destroyed many of their temples and was ruthless in forcing the orthodox regulations on his subjects. He banned playing of music and fought even against those Muslim kingdoms which did not subscribe to the puritanical pattern of his rule. He had to contend with a series of revolts by not only Hindu rulers but also Muslim nobles. He ruled for fifty years during which time, he emptied his treasury by his fanatical functioning and the senseless measures that he undertook. And thus the great Mughal Empire which Akbar had so solidly built, began to crumble and soon collapsed.

On the whole, the Great Mughals brought about the best and the most harmonious relations between Hindus and Muslims. Sir John Marshall rightly pointed out: "Seldom in the history of mankind has the spectacle been witnessed of two civilizations, so vast and so strongly developed, yet so radically dissimilar as the Muhammadan and the Hindu, meeting and mingling together. The very contrasts, which existed between them, the wide divergences in their culture and their religions, make the history of their impact peculiarly instructive."[5]

Sir Jadunath Sarkar, the most eminent and highly respected historian, enumerated in the following words, the benefits of the Muslim rule to India, while delivering the Sir Mayer Lectures at the Madras University in March 1928:

i. Restoration of touch with the outer world, which included the revival of an Indian navy and sea-borne trade, both

of which had been lost since the decline of the Cholas.

ii. Internal peace over a large part of India, especially north of the Vindhyas.

iii. Uniformity secured by the imposition of the same type of administration.

iv. Uniformity of social manners and dress among the upper classes, irrespective of creed.

v. Indo-Saracen art, in which the medieval Hindu and Chinese schools were blended together. Also, a new style of architecture, and the promotion of industries of a refined kind (e.g. shawl, inlaying work, *kinkhab*, muslin, carpet, and so on).

vi. A common *lingua franca*, called Hindustani or *Rekhta*, and an official prose style (mostly the creation of Hindu *munshis* writing Persian, and even borrowed by the Maratha *chitnises* for their own vernacular).

vii. Rise of our vernacular literature, as the fruits of peace and economic prosperity under the Empire of Delhi.

viii. Monotheistic religious revival and Sufism.

ix. Historical literature.

x. Improvements in the art of war and in civilization in general.

There is also no truth in the contention that the Muslim rulers were hostile to the scriptures and traditions of the Hindus. On the contrary a number of their courtiers took pains to translate the Vedas and the Upanishads into Persian to acquaint themselves with the beliefs and practices of the Hindus. The foremost among them was al-Biruni. He extolled

the Hindu concept of God and said like the Muslims, the Hindus also believed that "God is eternal, without beginning and end, acting by free will, almighty, all wise, living, giving life, ruling, preserving, one who in His sovereignty is unique, beyond all likeness and unlikeness."[6]

The famous al-Biruni studied Yoga Sutra and Bhagavad Gita. He was of the opinion that Hindu idols were "only memorials". Likewise Amir Khusraw declared that the Hindus also believed in one God; according to him they worshipped stones, animals, plants, and the sun as God's creations and not as God. The great Sufi Gaisu Daraz made a special study of Sanskrit to better understand the religious beliefs of the Hindus. The Mughals gave a lot of encouragement to Muslim scholars to learn Sanskrit and become acquainted with the Hindu scriptures; Akbar's Maktab Khana specialized in the learning of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Faizi's Persian translation of the Gita is still considered a classic. Jehangir gave impetus to the translation into Persian of Hindu religious works. Dara Shikoh's interest in the Vedas and the Upanishads was so deep that he was accused of being half Hindu.

Similarly most Sufis had developed a soft corner for the teachings of the Hindu rishis and many of the Sufis accepted Rama and Krishna as the prophets of God. Shaikh Nizamuddin Awlia of Delhi and Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti of Ajmer were so attracted by yogic ideas and practices that they even incorporated them into their teachings. Kabir loved Hindus

and Muslims so dearly that he truly made them think and live alike. Thus there was continuous intermingling of thought and mutual contact between Hindus and Muslims during the Muslim rule. Baba Fighani expressed the mood of the times thus:

> There is one lamp in this house, by whose rays,
> Wherever I look there is an assembly.[7]

One of the most reliable of contemporary chroniclers, Ziauddin Barani, a Muslim zealot, committed to the furtherance of imperial Islam, recorded in deep anguish that the Muslim rulers were too indulgent towards the Hindus: "The desire for overthrowing infidels and knocking down idolators and polytheists does not fill the hearts of the Muslim Kings (of India). On the other hand, out of consideration for the fact that infidels and polytheists are payers of tribute and protected persons (Dhimmis), these infidels are honoured, distinguished, favoured and made eminent; the kings bestow drums, banners, ornaments, cloaks of brocade and caparisoned horses upon them, and appoint them to governorships, high posts and offices. "And in their capital (Delhi), owing to the status of which the status of all other Muslim cities is raised, Muslim kings not only allow but are pleased with the fact that infidels, polytheists, idol-worshippers and cow-dung (sargin) worshippers build houses like palaces, wear clothes of brocade and ride Arab horses caparisoned with gold and silver ornaments. They are equipped with a hundred thousand sources of strength. They live in delights and comforts. They

take Mussalmans into their service and make them run before their horses. The poor Mussalmans beg of them at their doors; and in the capital of Islam, owing to which the edifice of Islam is elevated, they are called rais (great rulers), ranas (minor rulers), thakurs (warriors), sahas (bankers), mehtas (clerks) and pandits (priests). How under these conditions can Faith prevail over false creeds or truth be established at the centre."[8]

All through the Mughal rule, except during the time of Aurangzeb, there was regular participation of Muslims in Hindu festivals and vice-versa; this has been lucidly elaborated by P. N. Chopra in *The History and Culture of Indian People*, he writes: "On the occasion of the Dasehra festival, royal elephants and horses were washed, groomed, and caparisoned to be arrayed for inspection by the Emperor. Diwali or Dipawali was observed in much the same manner as it is today; fire-works were discharged and sweets and other presents were exchanged. Gambling was considered auspicious on this day and people kept awake the whole night trying one another's luck at dice. Akbar was interested in the festive aspect of the celebrations, while Jehangir preferred gambling. Sometimes the latter ordered his attendants to play the games, in his presence for two or three nights.

"During the time of the later Mughals, it appears, the permission of the Governor was necessary to hold the Diwali fair for which a poll-tax was sometimes levied. Akbar also took part in the celebrations of Goverdhan Puja, consisting of several cows. Properly washed and ornamented, the cows were

brought before him for review. Both solar and lunar eclipses were observed with all sanctity by the Hindus who fasted for 24 hours before the actual eclipse and passed the day in prayers. A bath in the Ganges on this occasion was regarded as of special merit and large numbers resorted to Hardwar, Kashi and Prayag."[9]

Sri Aurbindo, who has a special place in the hearts of all Hindus and whom even the RSS reveres gives a much more candid assessment of the Mughal Rule: "The Mogul empire was a great and magnificent construction and an immense amount of political genius and talent was employed in its creation and maintenance. It was as splendid, powerful and beneficent and, it may be added, in spite of Aurangzeb's fanatical zeal, infinitely more liberal and tolerant in religion than any medieval or contemporary European kingdom or empire."[10]

The communal Hindus, in their rage against the Muslims, disown all this and on the contrary paint almost all Muslim rulers as the eternal enemies of India, whose ancestors did nothing but harm every aspect of Hindu religion, culture and civilization. They deliberately distort not only the positive achievements of the Muslim rule in every sphere of human endeavour but also refuse to recognize the vast impact that Hinduism and Hindus in particular made on the Muslims; they propagate that Muslims never integrated with the Hindus and remained aliens all through the ages.

Dr. Muhammad Umar of Aligarh Muslim University has written an excellent treatise in Urdu wherein he elaborated

the vast impact that Hindu institutions and conventions made on the habits, customs and rituals of Indian Muslims and on their outlook of life and their style of living as well. It is titled *Hindustani Tahzeeb ka Mussalmanon pur Asar* and deals exhaustively with every aspect of their relationship. Dr. Umar has collected valuable material which conclusively demolishes the Two-Nation theory and brings out in sharp contrast the deep influence that Hinduism exercised on moulding the ...cter of Islam in India.

One of the lasting effects of Hinduism on Indian Muslims has been through the caste system. Despite Islam's emphasis on the equality of believers, the converted Muslims could not shed their caste complex. The high-born and low-born among them retained their classification; they took different nomenclatures but the old divisions continued. This became more evident when marriages (between members of different families) were arranged. For instance, a Sayyid would not marry a Shaikh or a Mirza or a Pathan. Horoscopes which determine the marital ties among Hindus, also became a regular feature among Muslims before deciding on the compatibility of the couple or on fixing the date of the marriage ceremony. They also asked for a *shajra* or family tree.

Many others rituals were also borrowed from the Hindus: the engagement ceremony, the dressing of the bride and the bridegroom, the bridal procession with the bridegroom atop an elephant or a horse, a band accompanying it, the breaking of a coconut for good luck, the qawwali or other music

programmes, even the *mujra* or the dance of nautch girls, the *rukhsati* or departure of the bride from her home to that of the bridegroom, with various pranks played on him by her relatives, all these are features peculiar to Indian Muslims, taken from the Hindus and have little in common with those of the Arabs or Iranians or even Turks. The decorating of the palms and feet of the bride and her relations with *mehendi* or henna is also typically Hindu practice, adopted by the Muslims.

There are also other Hindus customs observed by the Muslims such as the *barsi* or the annual remembrance of the dead, when the close relatives go to the grave and place flowers on it – a practice which the orthodox Muslims reject as *bidat* or innovation. There is yet another custom, which is taken from the Hindus and that is a child's initiation into learning, called *Bismillah*; this is similar to what is performed by a Hindu child while being sent to a *pathshala*. Elaborate preparations are made and relatives gather to see and hear the child utter the first word followed by feasting and rejoicing as among the Hindus. The Sufis too were greatly influenced by their contact with their Hindu disciples. They valued the Vedanta philosophy and the mystical teachings of the Upanishads.

Jinnah talked of Hindu heroes being different from Muslim heroes; so too are the heroes of the Gujaratis different from those of the Maharashtrians and of the Punjabis from the Tamilians and of the Bengalis from the Biharis. There are plenty of differences among different sects and groups, casteist or linguistic; but there are also many common bonds. Similar is

the case between Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi, Nehru and Azad stressed on these bonds while Jinnah harped on the differences. He said the style of living of the two communities was different. Superficially there may be some differences but, by and large, especially in the villages, they live and socialize in such harmony and camaraderie that it is difficult to distinguish a Hindu from a Muslim.

Similarly, there has been much fusion of Hindu and Muslim designs and workmanship in architecture. For instance the Qutb Minar which is embellished with Quranic verses, has its ornamentation copied from Hindu jewellery. In the Quwatul-Islam mosque the motifs are both Indian and Iranian. The arches in the tomb of Balban, now in ruins, also showed the same influence. Even Firuz Tughlaq (r.1351-88), despite his religious orthodoxy, used Hindu columns in madrasas. In the Tantipura mosque of Gaur the columns are exact replicas of those in the temples. The same design is noticed in what are called the Elephant Stables. This harmonious blending had its full flowering under the Mughals. Akbar's Fort at Agra has drawn extensively from the architecture of the Elephant Gateway in Gwalior. It became a precursor, depicting motifs of birds and animals, which were frowned upon by the mullahs. In the Panch Mahal, there are carvings showing Rama being worshipped by Hanuman. In several other Mughal monuments which are Islamic in conception and design, the Hindu influence is fairly prominent.

Painting is disapproved of by the Muslim devout; it is supposed to encourage idol worship. However it continued to

flourish in Iran even after the advent of Islam and in India both the Turks and the Mughals patronized it. This received the greatest impetus in the reign of Akbar which saw a fascinating blend of Iranian and Indian art visible in many works of that period. Some of the outstanding painters of his court were both Hindus and Muslims – Kalyan Das, Anup Chitre, Rai Anup and Manohar and Muhammad Nadir, Mir Hashim and Faqirullah Khan. Abul Fazl mentions them and extols the patronage bestowed on them by Akbar who was as generous to the Hindu artists as to the Muslims. The Mughal miniature reflects the distinctively Indian genius; it flowered also during the reigns of Jehangir, Shah Jahan and even in the early years of Aurangzeb.

Like painting, music is also looked down upon by the Muslim puritan; but because of the Sufis it acquired acceptability. Iraq and Syria, which were under Byzantine domination before their conquest by the Arabs and conversion to Islam, were responsible for changing the Muslim outlook and bringing it closer to the ancient Iranian heritage. The same happened in India; many of the Hindu customs were absorbed by the Sufis. The courts of the Khiljis and other Delhi sultans revelled in ancient Hindu arts, as observed by Barani. Hindu musicians and dancers became the favourites of Muslim rulers and they were regularly eulogized by the Muslim nobility who gave them financial support.

Amir Khusraw admitted that the Muslim arts were transformed by Hindu influence; it played a phenomenal part

in music and dance. Even the Sufis found the Hindu forms and tunes much more congenial and effective for their devotional practices than the Iranian ones with their Muslim overtones. Out of their interaction, new melodies and tunes were born. *Tarana* is, for instance, akin to *ullana* and qawwali is the result of this fusion; it adapts Indian rhythms to Persian and Arabic forms. One of Akbar's *navratan* or "nine jewels", the legendary singer Tansen (1555-1610) captivated the Muslims as much as the Hindus at Akbar's court. Tansen borrowed heavily from the musical rhythms of Persia. Even the Vijayanagar court gave full play to the mingling of Hindu music with that of Iran and Arabia. These traditions were passed down from generation to generation with the result that today some of the greatest exponents of Indian music and dance are Muslims.

These are facts which establish beyond doubt that there is far more in common, in every sphere, between Hindus and Muslims than the differences that divide them. Jinnah stressed the differences to suit his political purpose; but the ties are enduring; they demolish his theory that religion can be the basis of nationality; neither the Quran nor the Prophet has stated it; that is why even Arabs practising the same religion and speaking the same language but living in different parts of the world could not become one nation; nor have they been able to integrate with Iranians or Malaysians or Indonesians, or any one of them with the other. Muslim brotherhood is a myth; more blood has been shed by Muslims of Muslims than

of non-Muslims. Likewise pan-Islamism has been talked about by several enthusiastic devouts; but it has never worked in practice. Muslims of the world may sometimes meet together but they never unite in action. Indian Muslims have always been a group apart; they have never asked nor invited to participate in any of the collective deliberations of the Muslim world.

7

Religious Misconceptions

Apart from the historical distortions that communal Hindus indulge in to further their campaign of hate against Indian Muslims, they also resort to a number of religious misrepresentations with a view to convince the generality of Hindus that the Quran and the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad are antagonist to Hinduism. Many Hindu intellectuals have supported this view by quoting from some Muslim chroniclers and court recorders of the Muslim rule as well as the western detractors of Islam. The former had their own reason to concoct the versions; they wanted to glorify the imperial achievements of their rulers and tried to justify them on the basis of some religious edict or tradition; Ibn Khaldun, the doyen of Muslim historians, has described such records as "tissues of lies". As for the foreign critics, their interest had been to paint Christianity in bright and Islam in dark colours. They projected Islam as a religion of violence and

Christianity as the religion of love and compassion. These had a detrimental effect on relations between Hindus and Muslims.

Through books and pamphlets and the activities of their missionaries, who had landed in India simultaneously with the British rulers, western propagandists and commentators, impressed upon the Hindus that their reconciliation with the Muslims was not possible because Islam gave only two choices to non-Muslims: the Quran or the sword. They reminded the Hindus of their past subjugation under Muslim rulers despite the fact that their own scholar of great repute, Sir Thomas Arnold, after painstaking research, had convincingly proved by facts and figures in his monumental work, *The Preaching of Islam*, that Islam did not spread, to quote his words, "by the exploits of that mythical personage, the Muslim warrior with the sword in one hand and the Quran in the other, but by the force of the teachings of the Quran and the character of the Prophet".

H.G. Wells, a bitter critic of the Prophet, in his *Outline of History*, wrote: "Islam prevailed because it was the best social and political order that the times could offer... it was the broadest, freshest and cleanest political idea that had yet come into actual activity in the world and it offered better terms than any other to the mass of mankind." In India, the northern region which included the capital Delhi, where the Muslim imperial influence was predominant, remained overwhelmingly Hindu; conversions to Islam took place but these never covered more than one-sixth of the population and those who embraced Islam did so more for personal advancement or

social satisfaction than as a result of pressure from the rulers or their commanders.

Again, there is no basis for the allegation that Muslims fought and killed Hindus who did not convert; some Quranic verses are quoted in support of it. These are deliberately torn out of context; they were in reality directives given to Prophet Muhammad while he was engaged in a life-and-death struggle against the pagans of Mecca who were persecuting him and his followers. They had mounted one offensive after another against him even after he migrated to Medina. They conspired with the Jews to murder him and take over the city-state which had come under his charge; the Prophet guaranteed freedom of worship to all by promulgating the "Constitution of Medina" which provided equality of treatment to Muslims, Jews and pagans. To foil his efforts at consolidation, the Jews and the pagans secretly worked against him, despite the guarantee given by him and conspired with the Quraish of Mecca to wage wars against the Prophet and his followers. Allah thereafter gave specific instructions to the Prophet, in the form of the verses in the Quran which critics quote to denounce Islam as the religion of violence. They do not reveal the real purport of these revelations which were the directives by Allah to the Prophet to meet the aggression of his enemies against him and his disciples. They are not for general implementation; they are specific to the particular event. There are also other verses which pertain to other episodes in the Prophet's life; all these verses have been explained by exegesits through an elaborate thesis known as *asbabul nazul* or (reasons for

the revelations). I shall quote here the relevant verses which are self explanatory.

In surah al-Baqara, verses 190 to 193 state:

> Fight in the cause of God
> Those who fight you,
> But do not transgress limits,
> For God loves not transgressors.

Then there is the warning given to the faithful to meet the attacks by the pagans:

> And fight them on
> Until there is no more
> Tumult or oppression,
> And there prevail
> Justice and faith in God;
> But if they cease,
> Let there be no hostility
> Except to those
> Who practise oppression.

In the same surah, verse 216 says:

> Fighting is prescribed
> For you, though you dislike it.
> But it is possible
> That you dislike a thing
> Which is good for you,
> And that you love a thing
> Which is bad for you.

For God knows,
And you know not.

In verse 217 it is more explicitly put:

Tumult and oppression
Are worse than slaughter.
Nor will your enemies cease
Fighting you until
They turn you back
From your faith
If they can.

Surah al-Tauba deals with the situation when the pagans broke the treaties they had solemnly entered into with the Muslims. So far the faithful were restrained from fighting them; but, after their treachery, it became necessary to abrogate the treaties and ask the believers to confront them. Even so, the Quran told the faithful in verse 5 in the same surah:

But when the forbidden months
Are past, then fight and slay
The pagans wherever you find them,
And seize them, beleaguer them,
And lie in wait for them
In every stratagem of war.

However, they were cautioned:

But if they repent,
And establish regular charity,
Then open the way for them:

For God is Oft-forgiving,
Most Merciful.

In surah al-Tauba, verse 123 stated:

O you who believe in God!
Fight the unbelievers
Who gird you about,
And be firm with them.

In surah al-Hajj, verse 39 made it still more clear:

Against those with whom
You are at war,
Permission is given to fight them
Because you are wronged.

In surah Muhammad, verse 4 directs:

Therefore, when you meet
The unbelievers at war,
Smite at their neck;
And subdue them.
Thereafter show generosity
By granting them ransom.

Each verse mentioned aggression, tumult, oppression as the reason for fighting disbelievers who were waging wars against Muslims but cautioned that hostility should cease as soon as the threat receded. The verses were given for specific occasions; but they have been twisted by fanatical Muslims on the one hand and inimical non-Muslims on the other, who use them to show that these are general directives to fight all

non-believers everywhere and at any time; this is a deliberate distortion by those who want to either malign Islam as a religion, asking its followers to be constantly at war with non-Muslims or use it to promote their selfish interests. To take them out of context has been the regular pastime of the detractors.

A petition was filed in 1985 in the Calcutta High Court to ban the Quran as it was alleged that the above-mentioned verses preached disrespect to other religions and aggression against non-believers; however, after giving full hearing to both sides, Justice C.C. Basak dismissed the petition and said: "In my opinion it cannot be said that the Quran offers any insult to any other religion. It does not reflect any deliberate or malicious intention of outraging the religious feeling of non-Muslims. Isolated passages picked out from here and there, read out of context, cannot change the position." These verses however are no different from what Krishna told Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Did he not instruct Arjuna to kill even his own uncles and cousins? In the second discourse of the Gita, in verse 31, Krishna says to Arjuna:

Looking to thine own duty
Thou should not tremble
For there is nothing more welcome
To a Kshatriya than righteous war.

Further in the same discourse, Krishna uttered a warning to Arjuna in verse 34 that in case he failed to fight them:

Men will recount this their perpetual dishonour
And to one, highly esteemed
Dishonour is worse than death.

Krishna assured Arjuna in verse 37:

> Slain, thou will obtain heaven;
> Victorious, thou will enjoy here;
> Therefore, stand up
> And resolve to fight.

In the eleventh discourse, in verses 31-34 the direction was more specific:

> Drona and Bhishma and Jayadratha
> Karna and all the other warriors here
> Are to be slain by Me,
> Destroy them fearlessly.
> Fight: Thou shall crush thy rivals in the field.

The moral of the Gita is clear, namely that in the advancement of the true faith and in order to repel oppression, it is the duty of believers, as Dr. S. Radhakrishnan pointed out, "to maintain order by force".[1] These verses are thus no different from what has been said in the Quran. As in the Gita, so in the Quran, the emphasis is on the fight between men who believe in the Lord and those who deny His existence.

Arising out of the same misconception, another canard is spread, namely that Muslims divide the world into two separate and distinct spheres: *Darul-Harab,* the world of war, where Islam is subjugated and Darul Islam, where Islam is dominant. The Quran makes no such distinction; it emphasizes, on the contrary, the oneness of man and extols universal brotherhood. Classical jurists, prompted by their rulers, were responsible for coining these expressions to suit their masters' convenience

and their imperial objective. The Quran divides people into believers of God and non-believers in Him; its basis is the difference between truth and falsehood, virtue and vice; it declared unequivocally that the best of believers is one who performed *amalus saleh*, "good deeds". It is the same as the distinction between dharma and adharma in Hinduism. The fight between the two is eternal; it has to be waged in order that the good prevails over the bad.

The Quran, no doubt, stresses the brotherhood of believers and the Prophet repeatedly asked his followers to remain united. This does not mean that this brotherhood was exclusive or antagonistic to human brotherhood which is equally preached by the Quran. That is why the Prophet has been described in the holy book as a "Mercy to all God's creatures". Islam holds every human life sacred; it abhors the shedding of unjustified blood. This is explained by Allah in the Quran in surah al-Maidah, verse 32:

> If anyone kills another
> Without a just cause
> Except in retaliation to murder
> Or for causing corruption in the land,
> It is as if he has killed the whole of mankind;
> And whosoever saves a life
> It is as if he has saved the whole of mankind.

The message of the unity of mankind is given in clear terms in surah al-Hujurat, verse 13:

People are created in pairs
As males and females,
And from their union
Are formed nations and tribes;
So that they may know One another properly.
However, in the sight of God,
The most honourable of them
Are those who are
The most righteous.
God is, indeed, All-Knowing and Fully-Informed.

Again in surah al-Maidah, verse 48, the faithful are told:

To each people We have prescribed
A Law and a Way
Which is open and free.
If God had so willed,
He would have made all a single people.
But He desires to test each one
In what He has given to them,
So strive hard and compete
In righteousness and good deeds.
For the destination of all
Is to reach God.
He alone will show where each one differed.

The question of differences between people is clearly brought out in surah al-Muminun, verse 53:

People divide themselves
Into different sects

And cut themselves off
From the bonds of unity,
Rejoicing in their own sects.

Some commentators remark that verse 9 in surah al-Saff establishes the supremacy of the religion, as revealed to Muhammad, over all other religions. The verse reads:

It is God who has sent
His Apostle with guidance
To preach the Religion of Truth
That he may proclaim it
Over all religion
Even though the pagans
May detest this.

This has been repeated in surah al-Tauba, verse 33 and surah Fatah (61), verse 28. However according to Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali, one of the most reliable of the exegesist, the word, 'religion' used in these verses is singular and not plural. He writes: "There is really only one true religion, the Message of God, submission to the Will of God: this is called Islam. It was the religion preached by Moses and Jesus; it was the religion of Abraham, Noah, and all the prophets, by whatever name it may be called. If people corrupt that pure light, and call their religions by different names, we must bear with them, and we may allow the names for convenience. But Truth must prevail over all."[2] And the truth is one. The Vedas proclaim the same:

Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti
Sarva Panth Samabhaava

The Quran does not describe Muslims as the chosen people of God. On the contrary it chastises Christians and Jews for regarding themselves as such. Maulana Azad has pointed out in his commentary on the Quran: "The Jews used to assert that so long as one was not a member of the Jewish fold, there was no salvation for him. Likewise, the Christians used to assert that so long as one did not enter the Christian fold, there was no salvation for him. On the other hand, the Quran asserts that salvation rests entirely on devotion to God and righteous living and not on adherence to any particular group."[3]

Further in surah al-Tauba, verse 39, a clear warning is given to Muslims, as mentioned by the Maulana: "If ever Muslims as a community or nation fail to discharge their duty laid on them, the law of God will have its inevitable course by replacing them by another community which shall have the talent to fulfil it. History will bear out how often the truth advanced here by the Quran has demonstrated itself in the life of nations."[4]

The imposition of jaziya by some Muslim rulers on Hindus has irked the Hindus considerably; it has been one of the reasons for creating much misunderstanding between the two communities. It is a fact that some Muslim rulers did impose jaziya on Hindus; but, according to the canonical law of Islam, it could not be justified in the manner it was done in India.

The Prophet levied jaziya on the pagans and the Jews when he was engaged in wars during his stewardship of Medina; it was a sort of poll tax to compensate for zakat or the alms tax which was levied on Muslims. This was done to arrive at equality in taxation between the believers and the non-believers. Moreover, while Muslims were required to enlist in the army and defend Islam against its enemies, non-Muslims were rightly exempted from military service, as these wars or skirmishes were purely religious in nature and the Prophet did not think it right to ask non-Muslims to defend Islam which they had not accepted. There is only one verse, verse 29, in surah al-Tauba, which deals with jaziya:

Fight those who believe not
In God nor the Last Day,
Nor hold that forbidden
Which has been forbidden
By God and His Apostle,
Nor acknowledge the Religion
Of Truth (even if they are)
Of the People of the Book,
Until they pay the jaziya
With willing submission,
And feel themselves subdued.

Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments: "Jaziya: the root meaning is compensation. The derived meaning, which became the technical meaning, was a poll-tax levied on those

who did not accept Islam, but were willing to live under the protection of Islam, and were thus tacitly willing to submit to its ideals being enforced in the Muslim state, saving only their personal liberty of conscience as regards themselves. There was no amount fixed for it, and in any case it was merely symbolical – an acknowledgement that those who were not Muslims should bear a part of the financial burden which the state had to undergo in the course of a war. Imam Shafi (767-820), one of the four founders of Islamic Jurisprudence, suggested one dinar per year, which would be the Arabian gold dinar of a Muslim state, equivalent in value to about half a sovereign, or about 6 to 7 rupees. The tax varied in amount from time to time and there were exemptions for the poor, for women and children (according to Abu Hanifa — 699-767 — the senior-most founder of Islamic Jurisprudence) for slaves, and for monks and hermits. Being a tax on able-bodied males of military age, it was in a sense a commutation for military service."[5]

Allama Shibli Numani, the highly reputed Islamic scholar, was of the view that jaziya was a temporary and not a permanent tax; even the well-known orientalist Dr. D.S. Margoliouth admitted that "theoretically the system of Muhammad provided a quid pro quo for the poll-tax in relief from military service". However, it is also true that several Muslim rulers misused it and levied it on non-Muslims even when there was no basis for such imposition other than harassing and humiliating them. Prof. Bernard Lewis, the much-acclaimed orientalist, conceded

that the Quranic verse did not connote humiliation, but remarked: "What concerns us is not the original meaning of the verse but the way in which it was interpreted in historic Islam."[6]

Theologians in medieval times obliged the rulers by giving it religious sanction to suit their patron's convenience; but no interpretation, however ingenious, can alter the Quranic text or distort its real intent. In India none of the wars waged by these rulers were religious; also Hindus were freely recruited to their armies and no exemption from military service was given to them. They took active part in wars which even a ruler like Aurangzeb fought; many of his generals were Hindus, such as Jai Singh who commanded the Mughal forces against Shivaji. These negate the very basis for the imposition of jaziya. The emperor played with the Shariah, sometimes to please the fundamentalists and sometimes to advance his imperial purpose.

As for the concept of jihad, which has caused much resentment among non-Muslims, it has been deliberately misused by certain Muslim groups to fulfil their motivated objectives. The word is derived from *jehd*, meaning struggle. Hence it refers to struggle in the cause of God or in the pursuit of truth. Force is, of course, not excluded; but the term is generally classified into two: *al-Jihadul Akbar*, the greater struggle, and *al-Jihadul Asghar*, the lesser struggle. The former refers to conquest of one's self, to overcome temptation over evil, which may range from anger, revenge, avarice, to stealing,

cheating, even illicit fornication; the latter refers to the obligation to defend individually or collectively by means of force, against those who are enemies of Islam. The wars that were fought by the Ghoris, Khiljis, Tughlaqs, Lodhis and the Mughals in India were all for the furtherance of their family fortunes; none for Islam and none were so proclaimed by them. And yet because the rulers were Muslims, their wars have been described as jihad by historians. Likewise the murderous operations of the terrorists, who misuse it these days to further their political objectives, are falsely highlighted by both their supporters and detractors as jihad.

Allama Abdullah Yusuf Ali has pointed out that it is verse 20 in surah al-Tauba which provides the only appropriate description of what Allah means by jihad. And it thus rules out wars in India or the present terrorist activities in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India as jihad. This has been clearly explained by the Allama: "Mere brutal fighting is opposed to the whole spirit of jihad, while the sincere scholar's pen or the preacher's voice or a wealthy man's contributions may be the most valuable form of jihad."[7]

Maulana Azad has gone to the extent of saying that jihad can be waged by Muslims against even their co-religionists who do not truly follow the path of truth. He has stated that in the eyes of God those "who have sacrificed everything in the path of truth and endure steadfastly the trials and tribulations that befall them in the way of truth rank the highest. That is the criterion of goodness. It is a lesson for the

present day Muslims who have developed an outlook on life and follow a way of living so alien to the teachings of Islam".[8]

Jihad implies therefore as much a righteous deed, which helps a person to purify himself, as an armed defence against those who obstruct the believers in pursuing the path of truth. Maulana Maududi (1903-79), the founder of Jamat-i-Islami, has clarified that "the mere fact that you have entered Islam... does not entitle you to attack God's creatures nor does it give you the liberty, by using the name of God and His messenger to do all those evil acts which only the oppressors and rebels against God commit".[9] The Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Shaikh Abd al-Aziz bin Abdullah bin Muhammad Al al-Shaikh, stated in a fatwa that the hijackings and the attacks were "nothing but a manifestation of injustice, oppression and tyranny, which Islamic Shari'a does not sanction or accept, rather it is expressly forbidden and is amongst the greatest of sins".[10]

For the spread of these misconceptions, which has caused so much harm to Muslims, I am afraid Muslims are no less responsible. The process to malign Islam was, no doubt, started by the West, with Christianity using all its weapons against it, but the earlier Muslims successfully defeated their nefarious onslaughts and marched ahead. As Bernard Lewis, a well-known critic of Islam, has put it: "For many centuries, the world of Islam was in the forefront of human achievement — the foremost military and economic power in the world, the leader in the arts and sciences of civilization. Christian Europe,

a remote land beyond its northwestern frontier, was seen as an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief from which there was nothing to learn or to fear. And then everything changed, as the previously despised West won victory after victory first on the battlefield and in the marketplace, then in almost every aspect of public and even private life."[11]

But for the setback that occurred, the blame rests mainly on the faithful, who could not rise to stem the tide against Islam. On the contrary they did nothing to resist the new challenges. The Muslim rulers, the elite, the religious leaders, even the academic warriors, stuck to their outmoded traditions and adhered to archaic systems and irrelevant traditions; they would not give up their old forms of living and working — all these contributed to bring down the magnificent edifice of Islam which had been a beacon light to humanity. The fall has been so widespread that recovery has become most difficult. To worsen the situation, jihadis have now emerged, unleashing a reign of terror, which has generated such revulsion against Muslims that they are becoming the outcasts in society. The torchbearers of civilization have been taken — much to their dismay — by the rest of the world as the messengers of death and destruction thanks to the misdeeds of the so-called freedom fighters who pose as defenders of the faith.

8

Muslims in the Dock

Ignorance, it is said, is bliss; but for Indian Muslims, the ignorance of communal Hindus about Islam has been staggering. Every now and then they are asked to define the word *kafir* and to explain whether it applied to the Hindus. In the first place the term is not derogatory; secondly no responsible Indian Muslim, to the best of my knowledge, has used it for Hindus. Are words like atheist or agonistic derogatory? Nehru proudly claimed that he was an agonistic; Lenin that he was an atheist. In the medieval ages the courtiers of some Muslim rulers referred to Hindus as kafirs; but why should the present generation of Muslims be castigated for it? The logic behind such a perception, especially on the part of some fanatic Hindus, is that Muslims are taught by their religion to be contemptuous of Hindus and Hinduism; that is not true.

The truth, on the contrary, is that a section of Hindus have all along borne a certain contempt for the Muslims; the Madan and Sri Krishna Commissions have testified that police

officers, during the riots, referred to the Muslims as *landyas* while giving instructions to their subordinates. Muslims are often called by their Hindu detractors as *melechch*. Even during the heyday of the Muslim rule, the eminent chronicler al-Biruni reported that Hindus had "the most inveterate aversion towards all Muslims". Ibn Batuta, after his travels through various parts of India, wrote that no Muslim was allowed to enter the house of a Hindu or given food in their vessels. He observed: "If a Muslim is fed out of their vessel, they either break the vessel or give it away to Muslims."

The term *kafir* is derived from the word *kufr* which means "to hide or cover up"; it is used for disbelievers — those who deny the existence and unity of God. The Quran devotes a chapter to them which is called surah al-Kafirun. It is, in fact, a charter of co-existence guaranteeing freedom of worship. In surah al-Kafirun, verse 2 to 6, Allah commends Muhammad to tell the disbelievers:

I do not worship
What you worship
Nor do you worship
What I worship;
I will not worship
What you worship
Nor will you worship
What I worship;
To you, your religion
And to me, mine.

Hence the term *kafir* does not apply to Hindus because most of them believe in the oneness of God; those who do not are termed *kafirs*, but the Quran has made it clear that they can freely go about their own way. There is a well-known Quranic injunction in surah al-Baqara, verse 256: "There is no compulsion in religion". In the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* which gives a long survey of the use of *kafir* through the ages, there is no mention of its application to Hindus.

In Islam non-Muslims are called *dhimmis*; this is a highly respected term. It means the "protected ones". The Prophet said that any Muslim who ill-treated non-Muslims would be answerable to God on the Day of Judgement and that he himself would stand up for them. And yet some Muslim rulers defied these injunctions and perpetrated atrocities against the Hindus, who are no less *dhimmis* than the Christians and the Jews. The Quran specifically mentions that there is no land where God has not sent his messengers with the book of truth; in that case how could such a vast subcontinent be deprived of His revelations? That is why some Ulama accepted the Vedas as divinely inspired and Rama and Krishna as Prophets. Further, the faithful are warned that they should make no distinction between one prophet or another. One of the greatest religious leaders of the Middle Ages, Mazhar Jan-i-Janan had even declared that Hindus could be considered as *ahlul kitab* or "People of the Book" as they had the Vedas.

The poet-philosopher of modern Islam, Allama Iqbal was so moved by the *Gayatri Mantra* that he translated it in Urdu

verse and in the introduction, he affirmed that Hindus could not be considered as *kafirs* as they believed in the supremacy of God.

There is then the theory, propounded by the orientalists, and thoughtlessly advanced by the so-called jihadis that Islam condones, nay encourages, terrorism on the grounds that the Quran sanctions violence. It is accepted by communal Hindus and propagated ceaselessly against the Muslims. It is a corollary of the same allegation that Islam gave only two choices to the people: the Quran or the sword. It has also been deliberately used against Muslims by some of the western historians. The Quran itself refutes it. In surah al-Shura, verse 40, the faithful are told:

> The recompense for an injury
> Is injury equal to one received;
> However, if the injured
> Forgives and offers reconciliation
> Then his reward is from God
> For God loves all those
> Who refrain from doing wrong.

In verse 43 in the same surah it is further clarified:

> Indeed if you show
> Patience and forgive
> Then that would indeed be
> An act of courage;
> It will smoothen the conduct of affairs.

There are many other verses deprecating violence and emphasizing the virtues of compassion and forgiveness. In surah Ha Mim, verses 34 and 35, the believers are instructed:

Virtue and vice can never be the same,
Then repel vice by virtue;
In the end this will prove better
For enemies will then become friends.
And hatred forever will disappear.

The Prophet advised his followers that even aggressors should be befriended. When asked why, he replied that it was the best way to deter them from committing further aggression. There are several traditions in a similar vein. Two of the Prophet's oft-repeated sayings are:

* He who shows no compassion to his fellow beings will receive no compassion from the Almighty; and
* He who does not love God's creatures will forfeit His love.

From the saints and priests in the West to intellectuals like Voltaire and Dante, Islam has been damned in the most virulent terms; this continues to be their constant refrain. It is, therefore, strange to read, as a leading Dutch newspaper has said, that criticism of Islam in the present crisis should not be taboo. Even today a scholar of international fame like Samual Huntington, the author of the earth-shaking book *The Clash of Civilization* has stated: "The doctrines of Islam, it is argued, dictate war against unbelievers, and when the initial expansion of Islam tapered off, Muslim groups, quite contrary to the doctrine, then fought among themselves. The ratio of fatwa or internal conflicts to jihad shifted drastically in favour of the former. The Quran and other statements of Muslim beliefs

contain few prohibitions on violence, and a concept of non-violence is absent from Muslim doctrine and practice."

I asked the professor when he had dinner with me in my home in January 1998 whether he had read the Quran and he admitted that he had not. He went by what some of the orientalists had written about Islam. However not being aware of what the Quran truly preaches, Huntington remarked: "The demographic explosion in Muslim societies and the availability of large numbers of often unemployed males between the ages of fifteen and thirty is a natural source of instability and violence, both within Islam and against non-Muslims. Whatever other causes may be at work, this factor alone would go a long way to explaining Muslim violence in the eighties and nineties."[1]

In the history of Islam there was only one sect called Nizari Ismaili who pioneered the movement for terrorism. Its charismatic leader was Hasan-al-Sabbah (d.1124). His followers were trained to kill targeted individuals. They were given "hashish" from which the word "assassin" was drawn. To lure them to become martyrs, a "Garden of Paradise" was built, where sumptuous foods, drinks and women were provided for them. They were intoxicated and made to believe that when they died while accomplishing their entrusted task, they would go to heaven, where all these "fruits of enjoyment" awaited them. One of their victims was the Nizamul Malik — Prime Minister. Many other leaders put to death by them; even Saladin was on their list, who miraculously escaped their attack.

Their chosen target was the castle at Alamout. They had created such terror in the elitist class that Imam Ghazali (1058-1111), acclaimed by Muslims as the greatest Imam of all times, warned Muslims that if they did not destroy terrorism, terrorism would destroy them, adding that it violated every Quranic percept and tradition of the Prophet. Finally, Halaku, the brother of Ghengiz Khan invaded the hideout of the assassins in the mountains and killed every one of them thus destroying their murderous network.

Terrorism has now raised its murderous head once again; it received the greatest impetus in Pakistan where the ISI organized the so-called jihadis and trained them in the name of Islam to operate first in Afghanistan and then in India. They were so motivated that they believed that even if they died, heaven was assured for them. So strong was this religious doctrination, distorting Quranic verses and the traditions of the Prophet that hundreds of young Muslims volunteered to enlist and agreed to kill and be killed. Madrasas were established, where diabolical training for such heinous operations was given. In the result, dozens of them killed innocent men, women and children and in turn most of them were done to death. Their acts of terror have generated a wave of hatred against Muslims amongst non-Muslims making their very existence vulnerable. Islam has been maligned and Muslims are being looked down upon as potential murderers who are supposed to believe that killing of non-Muslims would guarantee them a place in paradise. This belief is an unwarranted slur on Islam and a gross distortion of its teachings.

Fatwa is an innovation; it has no religious sanctity. It is the opinion of a religious dignitary — a Mufti who gives his interpretation of a religious tenet, especially the one which has a legal bearing. That was its origin; but it degenerated into a weapon in the hands of vested interests to settle scores with their opponents. It has consequently been used by some Muslims to serve their particular interest or purpose.

During the heyday of Muslim rule, under the Umayyids, the Abbasids or the Ottomans, fatwa assumed the form of an institution which the ruler used to give a religious colour to his decree; it was reinforced by the opinion of a Mufti who was generally the ruler's appointee; The *Fatwa-i-Alamgiri* was the handiwork of the muftis, appointed by Aurangzeb, whose decrees were highly rated because they were appreciated and approved by the emperor, a strict puritan in religious matters. There was hardly a tinge of liberalism in these fatwas; hence they lost their importance with the passage of time. No one refers to them or relies on them these days.

It must, however, be admitted that in recent times some of the clerics have been misusing the grant of fatwas more for earning some money than performing a religious duty. In the process they have exploited the poor and illiterate Muslims, who ask them whether they are on the right path in their day-to-day life; all kinds of questions are asked, many personal and even trivial; for instance quaries are on what should be the length of the beard or whether one should keep a moustache or what should be the length of the pyjama (below or above the ankle) or should one urinate sitting or standing

or when and how should one cohabit with one's wife. The clerics have made a regular business out of their replies or so-called fatwas and there is a small section of Muslims who falls a prey to their tactics.

Some Hindus believe that fatwas are "Shariah-in-action" and are weapons which are often used to create mischief between Hindus and Muslims and provoke disharmony in the country. Their fears are, however, misplaced; no Muslim takes these fatwas seriously; they are sometimes publicized to harass those Muslims whom the orthodox try to malign; in the last century fatwas were issued against even eminent persons. For instance Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the tallest Muslim leader in the late nineteenth century, and the founder of the Aligarh Muslim University, was issued a fatwa brought by his opponents from the Grand Imam of the mosque in the Kaaba which decreed that the Sayyid should be killed for having advised Muslims to dine with Christians and for advocating the promotion of English education. Similarly, Allama Iqbal was also declared a kafir in a fatwa issued by a well-known kazi of Sialkot for having written poems in praise of Rama and Moses and extolling the vedic prayer, the *Gayatri Mantra*. These were just ignored by the Muslims and had no effect on those against whom they were issued.

There is the widely-spread misconception among the Hindus that Islam advocates the destruction of their idols. There is no basis to it. Islam, no doubt, opposes idol-worship; but so do Christianity and Judaism as also several sects among Jains, Buddhists and even Hindus. But the Hindu ire is directed

only against Muslims. This has led the Hindus to believe wrongly that Islam is fundamentally opposed to Hinduism. Islam's opposition to idol-worship has a historical background. The idol-worshippers of Mecca, whom the Prophet encountered, were different from Hindu idol-worshippers who do not deny the existence of one Super Being, though they call Him by different names. The idols of seventh-century Arabia represented tribal rivalry. That is why the gods and goddesses of these various tribes were constantly at war with one another. The tribals did not accept the supremacy and oneness of God; nor did they distinguish between good and bad, virtue and vice. They prided themselves on the exhibition of brute force, glorifying warfare. They practised infanticide and treated women as chattels.

The pagan Arabs had no book to guide them. The Hindus have a series of scriptures. The earliest were the Vedas which focused on the belief of one God. He was sometimes called Varuna, sometimes Indra and sometimes Agni; but finally they all agreed to call Him the Supreme Being, Prajapati or Viswakarma. This trend is also reflected in the ruins of Mohenjo-daro whose inhabitants worshipped one God rather than a multiplicity of gods. They styled Him as Om. Maulana Azad pointed out: "They believed that, this Being ruled over everything that submitted to the law of life devised by Him and that His attribute is Vedukum or 'eternal wakefulness'."[2] Then came the doctrine of Brahman and Atman of the Upanishads. The Brahman was also the one Supreme Being

hidden in all beings, all-pervading, the self within all beings, watching over all works, dwelling in all beings, the witness, the perceiver, the only one, free from all qualities.

There is, therefore, an acceptance of monotheism among Hindus also though it is not as pronounced as among Muslims. Expounding the philosophy of Adi Sankara, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati explained that according to the shastras, "Paramesvara, who is one, makes Himself into three. At three times He puts on three different guises... for performing the functions of creation, preservation and destruction." The Sankaracharya has further elaborated. "...one who says that Visnu is great and is different from Siva... is wrong. God has power which is more than what we possess. In fact He is omnipotent, therefore, at the same time He takes on different forms... The supreme God is one".

Hinduism is not as strictly monotheistic as Islam, but the central concept of the unity of God is common to both. To quote Dr. Radhakrishnan: "The Real is the supercosmic, eternal, spaceless, timeless Brahman who supports this cosmic manifestation in space and time. He is the Universal Spirit, Paramatman who ensoles the cosmic forms and movements. He is the Paramesvara who presides over the individual souls and movements of nature and controls the cosmic becoming. He is also the Purusottama, the Supreme Person, whose dual nature is manifested in the evolution of the cosmos. He fills our being, illumines our understanding and sets in motion its

hidden springs."[3] This compares most favourably with what the Quran says in surah al-Hashr, verses 23 and 24:

He is God,
There is none like Him
He is the sovereign, the Holy,
The One and Only.
He is the Embodiment of Perfection,
The Source of Peace,
The Preserver of Safety,
Exalted in Might;
The Compeller, the Sublime,
Glory be to Him.
He is above all partners,
He is the Creator, the Evolver,
The Possessor of most beautiful names;
All that is in the heavens and on the earth.
Sing His praises
And magnify His glory,
He is the Most-Powerful
And the All-Wise.

Nevertheless, there developed a strong pantheistic trend in Hinduism because of the multiplicity of gods and goddesses. After the Vedic period it was further strengthened, perhaps because of the non-Aryan influence, but even this trend could not dilute the unity of God. There is a world of difference in

the nature of idol-worship as practised in seventh-century Arabia, as mentioned in the Quran, and the idol-worshippers of India, who continued to recognize in one form or the other, the oneness of the Supreme Being. Pantheism has, no doubt, corrupted this faith among many sections of Hindus; the confusion is of their own violation but many Hindus blame Muslims for it. And thus the rage of the communal Hindus descends on the Muslims.

The Prophet did not, in fact, deliberately destroy idols, either during his 13 years of prophethood in Mecca or his 10-year rule over Medina. After his victorious entry into Kaaba in AD 630, he removed the 360 idols placed therein by the pagan Arabs, in defiance of the teachings of their ancestor, Prophet Abraham, but this was no act of vandalism. As all the Arabs had embraced Islam, the placement of the idols in the Kaaba had become superfluous. Tabari (839-923), the Arab historian of those times, vouchsafed that there was no destruction of idols.

In surah al-Anam, verse 108, the Quran has also admonished the faithful:

Do not revile those who
Worship other gods
Lest in their ignorance
They revile your God.
Each people adhere to
Their beliefs,
They act as they please.
But in the end

All shall return to their Lord
And will be told of the
Wrongs they did.

Hindus eulogize the achievements of men like Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) and Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati (1824-83); but they were both virulent opponents of idol-worship; the Maharshi, in particular, publicly destroyed them.

Hinduism is a vast ocean of beliefs in which innumerable weeds have grown over the centuries; but its central plank remains monotheistic. That is why Allama Iqbal in his introduction to the *Gayatri Mantra* said that "to associate the Hindu religion with *shirk* (associating partners to God) is, in my opinion, not correct". For instance, Qutaiba, the Muslim general who conquered Samarkand in the eighth century and took away all its idols of gold and had them melted, did so because he was in dire need of money; he did not do it to fulfil any Islamic obligation. History is replete with such examples.

More than the destruction of idols, what is held against Islam, particularly by communal Hindus, is the contention that Islam sanctions the demolition of temples; in support of it they refer to the misdeeds of some Muslim rulers in the medieval times; as explained earlier this was in clear violation of the Quranic injunctions. In surah al-Hajj, verse 40, the faithful are told:

Had God not checked
One set of people
From interfering in the
Affairs of another,

Monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques,
In which God's name is commemorated
Would surely have been pulled down.

There are several verses which unequivocally prohibit Muslims from resorting to such wanton act; in surah al-Baqara, verse 114 states:

Think over O people!
Who commits a greater wrong
Than one who hinders prayers
And tries to ruin, in his zeal,
The places of worship of others;
It is not fitting that
Such people should enter these
Unless they have the fear of God,
Otherwise they will face nothing but disgrace;
In this as well as the next world.

In surah al-Anam, verse 52, the faithful are warned:

Drive not away those
Who worship their Lord,
Morning and evening,
Seeking His Grace.
In no way are you accountable
For what they do,
Nor are they accountable
For what you do.
Hence do not drive them away
And become evil-doers.

In surah Yunus, verse 99, the Prophet was told by Allah how to go about his mission:

Had your Lord so wished,
All people everywhere
Would have been believers.
But that is not His way,
Hence do not force anyone
To take to Our path
Unless they do so willingly.

The Prophet was also informed in surah al-Hajj, verse 167:

For every group We have
Prescribed rites and ceremonies
Let them not then dispute
On these matters with you.

In the same surah, in verses 168 and 169 the Prophet was told that inter-religious disputes were best left to God to be settled:

In case they argue with you, O Muhammad!
Tell them: "God knows best, what you do.
God will judge between you and us
On the Day of Judgement
In regard to all matters of dispute."

There is no recorded evidence of the Prophet ever having destroyed a temple, church or synagogue; on the contrary when the Christian delegation of Najran came to see him at Medina,

he offered them his residence for their prayers. There is also the Quranic verse 6 in surah al-Tauba, which mentions the adoption of a tolerant attitude towards idol-worshippers:

> And if any one of the Pagans, O Muhammad!
> Seeks your asylum
> Then give it to him
> And later convey him
> To his place of safety.

Muslim rulers who destroyed temples, were new converts to Islam, with no proper grounding in its precepts. Maulana Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi in his book, *Arab O' Hindu ke Ta'alluqat*, has said: "The Turks, Afghans and Mughals who successively conquered northern India certainly professed Islam but it is wrong to hold Islam responsible for all their actions, good or bad. The tribal hordes, who poured through the Khyber Pass, though nominally Muslim, did not, in fact, represent Islam."[4] They were mostly emancipated slaves, newly converted, who had practically no knowledge of the Quranic teachings or the traditions of the Prophet. In Afghanistan, from where they poured into India, they did not have a single school of Muslim theology or learning. Hence, as Nadwi said, "...there is no justification for believing that the conduct of the Afghan tribes in peace or war was regulated by Islam".[5] The same applies to the hordes of Central Asia who founded the Mughal empire.

This has also been confirmed by Bernard Lewis; he observed: "the Mongol impact created a ruling elite of men

who bear Muslim names and profess Islam, but who impose and administer non-Muslim laws... In the fourteen centuries of Islamic history, few Muslim governments have adhered strictly to the Shariah. But where they failed it, was by error or avoidance, not by direct challenge... in the modernized Muslim states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Shariah law was not merely neglected or tacitly disregarded; it was, in certain important areas, repealed and replaced...."[6]

The communal Hindus also allege that Islam teaches Muslims to disrespect the religious leaders and mentors of other religions, especially of Hinduism. This is also far from true; they may not be as reverential towards, for instance, Rama and Krishna as their own prophet. But even during the Muslim rule the rulers as well as the elite and the ordinary folks gave all the respect to the religious dignitaries of the Hindus. In fact the Quran enjoins upon the faithful not to revile other religions and make no distinction between the various prophets.

Several theologians, in medieval times, notably Hazrat Mirza Mazhar Jan-i-Janan, declared that Rama and Krishna were the prophets of God; it stands to reason that a vast subcontinent, inhabited by millions of God's creatures, could not have been deprived of His messengers, when the Quran specifically states that "to every people We have sent an apostle" and further, to teach them "in their own language." Maulana Sayyid Sulaiman Nadwi, in his monumental work, *Seeratun Nabi*, observed: "According to the teachings of the Prophet, it is necessary to believe that in countries such as

China, Iran or India there appeared prophets before the advent of Muhammad. No Muslim can really deny to the peoples in these lands, the truth of the faiths, ascribed to the mentors venerated by them." Similarly Mirza Abul Fazl in his well-known book *Faith of Islam* asserts: "All the Vedic rishis of old and Krishna, Mahavira and Buddha of India, Zarathustra of Persia and Confucius of China have alike a place in the hearts of the followers of Islam." There is also the Quranic reference to the community of Sabaeen, which, no less a theologian than Shah Waliullah states, referred to Hindus of Aryan origin. Nadwi also bracketed them with Jews and Christians and wrote that they could be considered as "People of the Book". There is also the saying of the Prophet that he received divine fragrance from across the seas, pointing to India, Allama Iqbal has versified it thus:

Meer-i-Arab ko Aiyee Thandee Hawa Jahaanse
Mera Watan wohi hai, Mera Watan wohi hai.

From whence the chief of Arabia received divine fragrance,
That is my country, that is my land.

Hazrat Ali, the fourth caliph and son-in-law of the Prophet is reported to have said that the most invigorating breeze came to Arabia from India. The Quran devotes more than one-fourth of its verses to narrate the stories of other prophets, with a view to assure the Prophet that he need not be disheartened by the opposition he faced; prophets before him were similarly persecuted. In surah Ali-Imran, verse 146, Muhammad is informed:

How many of the prophets fought
To uphold God's faith
And carried with them
Hordes of men of hope?
However they never lost faith
Even if they met with disaster,
Nor did they weaken or give in
For God loves those
Who are firm in their resolve.

Further, there is a warning that the faithful should not make any distinction between one prophet and another. In surah al-Baqara, verse 285, God admonishes the believers:

Among the apostles, make no distinction.
For they have all proclaimed:
That they heard the message
And they obeyed it.
They asked for the forgiveness of the One
To whom is the journey's end.

There is, therefore, no truth in the allegation against Indian Muslims that they show no reverence to Rama, Krishna or other Hindu deities; in fact Iqbal has characterized Rama as Imam-i-Hind, the spiritual leader of India, in a celebrated poem:

The cup of India has always overflowed
With the heady wine of truth.
Even the philosophers from the West

Are her ardent devotees.
There is something so sublime in her mysticism
That her star soars high above the constellations.
There have been thousands of rulers in this land
But none that can compare with Rama.
The discerning ones proclaim him,
The spiritual leader of India.
His lamp gave the light of wisdom
Which outshone the radiance
Of the whole of humankind.
Rama was valiant, Rama was bold,
Rama yielded deftly his sword,
He cared for the poorest of poor,
He was unmatched in love and compassion.

Urdu literature is flooded with eulogies to Sri Krishna; his character and philosophy of action is profusely acclaimed. In every age some of the most eminent Muslims from Iqbal to Sahir Ludhianavi wrote and sang his praises. For instance Maulana Hasrat Mohani, one of the most renowned Urdu poets, wrote:

Every note of Krishna's flute,
Is, indeed, a message of eternal life.

Similarly, another great poet, Seemab Akbarabadi sang:

With his refreshing and soothing flute,
Krishna sings his songs of love,
Sometimes he does it

In the vein of a Prophet,
And sometimes as a wandering milkman,
Promoting love in human hearts;
He made the land of India
Reverberate with his melodies
As composed in the Gita.

Sahir Ludhianavi, the noted lyricist, is ecstatic about Krishna in the following poem, as translated into the English:

Krishna has promised,
That he will come back
Whenever the earth is menaced
By injustice and oppression
And when chaos and anarchy
Threaten to pervade it
Krishna comes to us;
When everything becomes hostile and critical
He arrives to help the aggrieved
And rescue the oppressed.
Krishna is not a sect or a creed
Nor is he a being;
He is the embodiment
Of our hopes and aspirations
He is the unending link
That binds us
To eternal salvation.
In age after age

He comes whenever needed
To give relief and succour
To the distressed and the dismayed.
Krishna is not a person,
He is action personified
He is a chain in the eternity of existence,
He takes new shapes and forms,
Every time He comes to us
To redeem and lift us
To fulfil the urges and longings
Of age after age
Krishna is indeed the fulfilment
Of the unfulfilled yearnings of every age.

The greatest Urdu poet of all times, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797-1869), wrote a long poem in Persian on the majesty of Benaras or Kashi which is the most soul-stirring tribute that any poet has ever paid in any language to Benaras.

It is entitled *Charagh-i-Dair* (temple lamps) and has been beautifully translated into the English by the great Urdu novelist, the Jnanpith award-winner, Qurratulain Hyder:

May Heaven keep
The grandeur of Benaras, arbour of bliss, meadow of joy,
For oft-returning souls
Their journey's end.
In this weary Temple-land of the world.
Safe from the whirlwind of Time,
Benaras is forever spring,

Where autumn turns
Into the touch of sandal
On their foreheads,
Springtide wears the sacred thread of flower-waves,
And the splash of twilight
Is the crimson mark of Kashi's dust
On heaven's brow.
The Kaaba of Hind, this conch-blowers' dell!
Its icons and idols
Are made of the Light
That once flashed on Mount Sinai.
These radiant, idolatrous naiads
Set the pious Brahmins afire
When their faces glow
Like moving lamps
On Ganga's banks.
Morning and moonrise,
My Lady Kashi
Picks up the Ganga-mirror
To see her gracious beauty
Glimmer and shine.
Said I one night to a pristine seer
(Who knew the secrets of whirling Time),
'Sir, you well perceive,
That goodness and faith,
Fidelity and love
Have all departed from the sorry land.
Father and son are at each other's throat;

Brother fights brother. Unity
And Federation are undermined.
Despite these ominous signs
Why has not Doomsday come?
Why does not the Last Trumpet sound?
Who holds the reins of the Final Catastrophe?
The hoary old man of lucent ken
Pointed towards Kashi and gently smiled.
'The Architect,' he said, 'is fond of this edifice
Because of which there is colour in life; He
Would not like it to perish and fall.'
Hearing this, the pride of Benaras
Soared to an eminence
Untouched by the wings of thought.

There is no recorded evidence that ordinary Muslims ever indulged in either the destruction of temples or idols; they have, on the contrary, always shown due respect to the religious sentiments of the Hindus. Urdu literature is replete with songs glorifying Krishna and extolling the importance of Hindu epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata. Even parts of the Vedas and the Upanishads are translated and eulogized in Urdu. There is much ignorance about this among Hindus; they are made to believe that Muslims neither read the scriptures of the Hindus nor revere them.

9

Shivaji and Vivekananda

In their campaign of hate against Muslims, the Hindu communalists concentrate on two towering and magnificent figures who have done India proud — Shivaji Maharaj and Swami Vivekananda. Their services to the awakening of Hindus was unparalleled. Both gave a new vigour to the projection of Hinduism and put it on the centre-stage, revealing its inner strength and the spirit of broad humanism that permeated its teachings. Both were liberal in their outlook and advanced the cause of universal brotherhood. They respected Muslims and appreciated the contributions of Islam to the spread of love and compassion among Hindus and Muslims; they admired especially the humanistic teachings of the Sufis. It is wrong on the part of the Hindu communalists to project these two heroes as the unquestioned and brave fighters against Muslims and the redoubtable enemies of Islam; their role throughout their career has been the quite contrary.

Let us first look at the career of Shivaji who is revered by the Hindus as the great crusader against Islam to see if there is any historical basis for it.

In medieval times, when religious dogmatism was the rage all over the world, Shivaji exhibited an outlook against bigotry which has few parallels in the annals of the world. He fought no doubt against one of the greatest Muslim empires of those days and was inspired by the teachings of his own religion but surprisingly he never allowed himself to preach or practise hatred against followers of other religions, including Islam. On the contrary, the recent research that has been carried out about his rule, reveal that he was motivated by broad secular values. Stories and plays written about him unfortunately give a narrow, distorted image of him. Politicians have also used his name to promote parochialism and to divide the people on religious and regional basis.

The latest edition of the highly reliable *Cambridge History of India*, after an objective study of Shivaji's exploits, concludes: "Let us pause to consider the sort of polity that Shivaji was carving out in the Pune region. Many of the major writers on the subject would have us believe that Shivaji was creating a Hindu state, something fundamentally different and in opposition to the Muslim states that surrounded it. The Brahmin historians of the twentieth century, starting with Rajwade, especially wanted to prove that Shivaji was guided by Brahmin advisors from early in his life, and that he had a vision of a state based on something called 'Maharashtra

Dharma'. Much of this, if not all, has been shown by later research to be an artefact of the researchers, not a fact of the period."[1] This was testified by the eminent historian, Sir Jadunath Sarkar: "Shivaji's religious policy was very liberal. He respected the holy places of all creeds in his raids and made endowments for Hindu temples and Muslim saints' tombs and mosques alike. He not only granted pensions to Brahman scholars versed in the Vedas, astronomers and anchorites, but also built hermitages and provided subsistence at his own cost for the holy men of Islam, notably Baba Yaqut of Keloshi." Sarkar also discounts any efforts made by Shivaji to find a theocratic state: "An attempt has been made in the present generation to prove that the Maratha national hero's political ideal of an independent Hindu monarchy was inspired by Ramdas; but the evidence produced is neither adequate nor free from suspicion. The holy man's influence on Shivaji was spiritual, and not political."[2]

The actual facts confirm that right from the beginning, Shivaji adopted a humane policy towards not only the people under his command but also the subject under his rule, irrespective of their caste or creed. This became evident when he started to recruit soldiers and select officers for the armed forces. It has now been established that more than one-third of his army consisted of Muslims and that the officers manning his navy were Muslim Siddis. He entrusted the supreme command of the navy to Siddi Sanbal, who was assisted, from time to time by Noor Khan, Daulat Khan and Siddi Misri.

Among the judges appointed by him were Kazi Abdullah-bin, Kazi Mohammed Hakim and Kazi Habib.

Shivaji's most trusted general in all his military campaigns was Haider Ali Kohari. Even his chief security guard was a Muslim, Hasan Kohari who was also in charge of the security of his mother, Jijabai. Imamuddin Kohari supervised all his military campaigns. When Shivaji was detained at Agra Fort by the order of the Emperor he relied on two men for his eventual escape. One of the two was a Muslim, Madari Mahtar. Similarly during his historic encounter with Afzal Khan, Siddi Ibrahim was his bodyguard. In his fight against Aurangzeb, the man who commanded the Mughal forces was a Hindu – Raja Jai Singh.

Shivaji's respect for Islam was deep-rooted; this was evident when he met a Muslim saint. During his visit to Khails in Ratnagiri district, he paid a personal visit to the hospice of Hazrat Yaqut Baba Sarvari and granted him a *dastaweez* of 600 acres of land. He told his followers: "*Hazrat Baba Yaqut bahut thorwale*." He also paid reverence to Moin Baba whose hospice was situated in Maloani. In the midst of his military campaign in Balapur, he found some of his soldiers had looted the hospice of Hazrat Inayat Shah; he reprimanded his men and personally apologized to the saint and granted him a lifelong pension. On another occasion, when a similar incident took place in the hospice of Hazrat Jainul Shah, Shivaji assured the saint that he would be given full protection thenceforth. Grant Duff in his memoir of Shivaji has picturesquely described the

encounter between Shivaji and Hazrat Jainul Shah; it was not only a meeting of two minds but also of two hearts.

The noted British historian, Dennis Kinkaid recorded: "Even his enemies admire his extreme respect for Mussalman priests, for mosques and for the Quran. The Muslim historian Khafi Khan, who did not mention Shivaji in his chronicle without adding an epithet of abuse, nevertheless, acknowledges that Shivaji never entered a conquered town without taking measures to safeguard the mosques from damage; whenever the Quran came into his possession, he treated it with the same respect as if it had been one of the sacred books of his own faith; and that whenever his men captured Muslim women they were brought to Shivaji who looked after them as his own wards till he could return them to their relations."[3] Kinkaid said that it was worth remembering that such enlightenment was in sharp contrast in the same century to the treatment given to the followers of other faiths by the rulers in Europe, especially in Italy and Germany and by Cromwell in Ireland. The noted historian Habibur Rehman Sherwani has also given a graphic account of Shivaji's various meetings with the Muslim saints and the respect he showed to them. The celebrated historian, G.S. Sardesai in his *New History of the Marathas* has narrated that Shivaji built a mosque for Muslims in front of his palace in his capital Raigad at the same time he built a temple of Jagadishvar for his own daily worship. Such concern for the people of another faith by a ruler was unthinkable in those times.

During his military campaigns Shivaji issued strict instructions to his men and officers that Muslim women and children should not be subjected to any maltreatment and that mosques and dargahs were to be given proper protection. This has also been testified by Khafi Khan. He was equally protective of the followers of Christianity and their places of worship. Bernier in his well-known work: *Travels in Mughal Empire*, has given fulsome praise to Shivaji for his concern for Father Ambrose whose church in Gujarat was under attack. Shivaji took care to see that no harm came to the priest or his church. He told his soldiers: "Priests are good people. They should not be troubled."

The greatest proof of Shivaji's broadmindedness is contained in his long letter to Aurangzeb wherein he protested against the imposition of jaziya on the Hindus; it is a remarkable document which exudes statesmanship of a high order. He reminded the emperor that jaziya had not been imposed on the Hindus before by any of his predecessors. He was full of praise of Akbar whom he often referred to as *Jagad Guru*; his respect for the great emperor was unbounded. Shivaji also appreciated the just and fair treatment given to the Hindus by Jehangir and Shah Jahan. As compared to them Shivaji wrote to Aurangzeb: "But in your Majesty's reign, many of the forts and provinces have gone out of your possession, and the rest will soon do so too, because there will be no slackness on my part in ruining and devastating them. Your peasants are downtrodden; the yield of every village has declined — in

place of one lakh (rupees) only one thousand, and in place of a thousand only ten are collected and that too with difficulty. When poverty and beggary have made their home in the palaces of the Emperor and the Princes, the condition of the grandees and officers can be easily imagined. It is a reign in which the army is in ferment, the merchants complain, the Muslims cry, the Hindus are grilled, most men lack bread at night and in the day inflame their own cheeks by slapping them (in anguish). How can the royal spirit permit you to add the hardship of the jaziya to this grievous state of things? The infamy will quickly spread from west to east and it will be recorded in books of history that the Emperor of Hindustan, coveting the beggar's bowl, takes jaziya from Brahmans and Jain monks, *yogis*, *sannyasis*, *bairagis*, paupers, mendicants, ruined wretches and the famine-stricken — that he dashes down to the ground the name and honour of the Taimur dynasty!"

Continuing in the same vein, Shivaji reminded Aurangzeb: "May it please your Majesty! If you believe in the true Divine Book and Word of God (the Koran), you will find God is styled there as '*Rabb-ul-aalameen*', the Lord of all men and not '*Rabb-ul-musalmeen*', the Lord of the Muslims only. Verily, Islam and Hinduism are terms of contrast. They are (diverse pigments) used by the true Divine Painter for blending the colours and filling in the outlines (of His picture of the entire human species). If it is a mosque, the call to prayer is chanted in remembrance of Him. If it is a temple, the bells are rung in

yearning for Him alone. To show bigotry for any man's own creed and practices is equivalent to altering the words of the Holy Book. To draw new lines on a picture is equivalent to finding fault with the painter... In strict justice the jaziya is not at all lawful. From the political point of view it can be allowable only if a beautiful woman wearing gold ornaments can pass from one province to another without fear or molestation. (But) in these days even the cities are being plundered, what shall I say of the open country? Apart from its injustice, this imposition of the jaziya is an innovation in India and inexpedient. If you imagine piety to consist in oppressing the people and terrorising the Hindus, you ought first to levy the jaziya on Rana Raj Singh, who is the head of the Hindus. Then it will not be so very difficult to collect it from me, as I am at your service. But to oppress ants and flies is far from displaying valour and spirit. I wonder at the strange fidelity of your officers that they neglect to tell you of the true state of things, but cover a blazing fire with straw!"[4]

Lala Lajpat Rai in his biography of Shivaji has pointed out that the real fight was between Shivaji and the Mughal forces, commanded by the Rajput, Jai Singh. It could, therefore, never assume a religious colour. There was no talk of a confrontation between Islam and Hinduism nor did Shivaji encourage it. S.M. Pagadi, an accepted authority on Shivaji writes: "It would be wrong to depict the struggle of Shivaji against the Mughals as a struggle between the Hindus and the

Muslims." Shivaji was, nevertheless, most devoted to Hinduism. The distinguished scholar B.N. Pande has said:

"He was undoubtedly a believing Hindu, his attachment to his faith being one of the deepest formative factors which he inherited from his mother and his childhood associates. The Brahmanic ethos, moreover, was one of the most important forces for his legitimation, even for mobilization. His sovereign status as a Chhatrapati was accepted certainly more by his dazzling achievements but also by the recognition given to it by the pundits, the epitome of orthodox Brahmins, the recognized law-givers." His personal religious affiliation, however, never came into the way of, what Pande has said "his broad humanitarian sympathies, even less to his essentially pragmatic political insight. He fought against Ahmednagar, against Bijapur, against the Mughals, against a host of Maratha Sardars, at a time even against his brother, but he never penalized a person for what he says, for his personal religious sympathies or affiliations."[5]

V.B. Kulkarni in his *Portrait of a Patriot* writes of Shivaji's deep devotion to his ancestral faith and the all-pervading influence of his pious mother. Moreover he was determined to protect the Hindus in their own land and secure for them the freedom of worship and independence of existence. Thus he exacted full requital. He grew up in an environment where saints and savants preached love and compassion. Tukaram, whose simple songs in praise of the universal God had captured

the hearts of every Maharashtrian, influenced Shivaji no less. Tukaram advised Shivaji thus:

There is only one truth in the world.
There is only one soul in all beings.
Pin thy faith to this soul.
See thyself mirrored in Ramdas.
Do this, O Prince
And thou and the whole world
Shall be thus blessed.
And thy fame will pervade the whole universe.

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Swami Vivekananda stands in an entirely different category; he was basically a preacher of the rarest distinction who gave a new dimension to Sanatan Dharma. He brought out in their broadest manifestation, the secrets of human emancipation and explored brilliantly the spiritual insights, with which the Vedas and the Upanishads were embellished. He was no sectarian; his love transcended all creeds. That is why he had an appropriate understanding of the spiritual obligations of Indian Muslims and was most sympathetic to them. He never associated himself with the campaign of hate against them; it is a pity that some Hindu communalists are whipping this up in his name.

The protagonists of Hindutva are spreading the canard that Swami Vivekananda is their inspiration and mentor for promoting aggressive and militant Hinduism and for promoting ethnic and economic cleansing of the Muslims. From my study

of the teachings and the activities of the great Swami I find that what they contend about the Swami is totally incorrect. He was, on the contrary, a convinced champion of good relations between Hindus and Muslims. As for his involvement in Hinduism, he was more an iconoclast than a revivalist; more a unifier than a divider; more a universalist than a sectarian.

I have narrated in my book: *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims* an amusing encounter that took place in the Yervada jail in 1940 between Mahadev Desai, secretary to Gandhiji and the great Patel. They were co-detinues. Desai found the Sardar not well-versed in the tenets of Hinduism and hence asked him one day to study the teachings of Vivekananda to better acquaint himself with these; the Sardar asked him, rather innocently, who was Vivekananda. Desai was taken aback and gave him Romain Rolland's book on the life of the venerable Swami. Though the Sardar and the Swami were intellectually and temperamentally different, there was one factor, which knit them together in an unbroken bond and that was their love for India and their robust patriotism. It was, in fact, this aspect of the Swami, which impressed Gandhiji so much that after going through Vivekananda's works, he said: "The love that I had for my country became a thousand fold."

Like Gandhiji, the Swami was a proponent of broad humanism; both believed that it was the basis of Hinduism. In November 1993, in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the communal riots and the bomb blasts, which took place thereafter, the London School of Oriental Studies,

of which I had been a student, organized a workshop, in which some of the leading intellectuals participated. It coincided with the centenary celebrations of Vivekananda's celebrated address to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The initiative for the workshop was taken by Prof. Nemai Sadhan Bose of Calcutta, who urged upon Prof. William Radice of the London University to collect the various scholars from all over the world "to give scholarly attention to Vivekananda's social and religious ideals, to rescue them from the distortions that were being worked on them by fundamentalists keen to co-opt Vivekananda to their cause."[6] The workshop unanimously came to the conclusion that "any attempt to project the Swami as a Hindu revivalist, fundamentalist or communalist grossly contradicts the evidence."

Radice explained that the Swami's vision of the future of India consisted of an amalgam of the best in the two major communities. According to Prof Tapan Raychaudhuri of the Oxford University, the Swami was "among the earliest nationalist thinkers to claim the Indo-Islamic past as part of the Indian heritage."[7] Sister Nivedita, one of his earliest and closest disciples, has recorded that her mentor took "intense pride in the artistic inheritance of the Mughal era and his admiration for the Mughal policy of taking Hindu brides so that the rulers of India had Muslim fathers and Hindu mothers."[8] In today's India, where power vests with the Hindus, he would have been happy to note that in several cases the marital coupling had reversed.

Equality of human beings, irrespective of their castes or creeds, was one of the most important features of Vivekananda's ideal society; he had stressed this time and again. But this equality that he preached did not imply "the equalization of all human beings." He explained that human beings were not and could not be equal; their shapes and forms were different; their attributes were different; their natural capacities differed. Hence, he said, sameness in physical forms or social status could never be attained; to do away with such differences would bring about death and annihilation. Even the ideals and outlooks of people varied from age to age, group to group, individual to individual; he advised, "Let everyone do the best he can for realizing his own ideal... Unity in variety is the plan of creation."

Vivekananda did not, however, condone the prevalence and perpetuation of man — contrived privileges for one sect and discriminations against the other. As he put it, "We preach neither social equality nor inequality, but that every being has the same rights and insist upon freedom of thought and action in every way." He went further and said that those who were not ready to give freedom of thought and action to others did not deserve to have these for themselves. His heart bled for the poor and he refused to distinguish them on the basis of their religious or casteist affiliation. He said the poor were the backbone of the nation; if they ceased to work, the governmental mechanism would come to a standstill and there would be panic and anarchy all around.

Vivekananda struggled for the abolition of all preferences — of one nation against another, of one community against another, of one sect against another, of one individual against another. He wrote, "The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in the Vedanta." He applauded the variety of religious traditions and pointed out that the Vedanta had nothing against it. He said, "...Whether you are a Christian, or a Buddhist, or a Jew, or a Hindu, whatever mythology you believe, whether you owe allegiance to the prophet of Nazareth, or of Mecca, or of India, or of anywhere else, whether you yourself are a prophet — it has nothing to say. It only preaches the principle which is the background of every religion and of which all the prophets and saints and seers are but illustrations and manifestations."[9] He told his followers: "Never judge the customs of other people by your own standards." Nor was he particularly enamoured of Hindu customs or rituals. He did not accept, for instance, that bathing in the Ganga would purify a Hindu of all his sins; in that case, he said, fish would be the purest of all beings.

The Swami showed equal respect to all religious scriptures; he once asked his disciples, "Who has given you the right to say that truth exists nowhere else but in the Vedas." A true Vendantist, he told the Hindus did not talk of the superiority of one religion over another. Even "toleration" of other faiths was not right; it smacked of blasphemy. He said, "Why should I tolerate. Toleration means that you are wrong and I am just allowing you."[10] His Guru Sri Ramakrishna, he pointed out, had accepted all religions as true.

I shall narrate a few incidents from the Swami's life to illustrate the liberality of his outlook, particularly in relation to Indian Muslims. He often talked feelingly of a Muslim fakir — Zulfikar Ali, who had saved his life when as a wandering monk in the early stage, the Swami collapsed at a place near Almora. He had eaten no food for several days. The fakir found him half dead and gave him a cucumber to eat, which revived him. The Swami had several intellectual encounters with Muslim theologians and confessed that these widened his spiritual horizon. He was impressed by the fact that the Quran had retained its pristine purity despite the lapse of more than a thousand years. He went through it and praised it as "an intellectual and spiritual possession." He unhesitatingly accepted the invitation of a Maulvi to have a meal with him and told him not to bother about making any special arrangement for him. Likewise at Mount Abu he agreed to live in the home of a Muslim lawyer, on the condition that he treated him as a member of his family, partaking the same food as they did. The lawyer did not, of course, cook any meat during the Swami's stay, though Vivekananda did not disapprove of meat-eating. His staying with a Muslim was frowned upon by the orthodox Hindus; but this had no effect on him. He told them, "I am above all your social conventions... I am not afraid of you people and your society. You know nothing of God and the scriptures."[11]

The Swami, while on his travels through the length and breath of India, watched with interest the way the village folks lived together especially the goodwill that prevailed between Hindus and Muslims. There was mutual concern for each other.

In this he saw the real unity of India. He said that the piety of the Hindus on the banks of the Ganga was no different than the piety of the Muslims offering their namaaz in a mosque. During his travels, he once met a Muslim woman in Kashmir, who created a deep impact on his mind. He was accompanied by sister Nivedita who has recounted it thus: "Not least of these pictures (of the beauty of Kashmir) is the memory of the handsome old woman, wearing the crimson coronet and white veil of Kashmiri peasants, who sat at her spinning wheel under a great chennar tree in a farm surrounded by her daughters-in-law, when we passed that way, and stopped to visit her. It was the Swami's second call on her. He had received some small kindness at her hands the year before, and had never tired of telling how after this, when he asked, before saying farewell, 'And mother, of what religion are you?' Her whole face had lit up with pride and joy, and her old voice rung out in triumph as she answered loudly and clearly, 'I thank our God; by the mercy of the Lord, I am a Mussalman."[12] The Swami was moved by the intensity of faith of the poor woman!

Swami Vivekananda was a great exponent of freewill and freedom of choice. A brother monk had given shelter to a Muslim orphan; he asked Vivekananda how he should bring him up. He replied, "Look after him as your own but do not interfere with his religion". Because of his transparent love for all, without a tinge of prejudice, the Swami was warmly welcomed by the followers of all religions, including the Muslims wherever he went. It is said that the Nizam of Hyderabad had once offered to bear the expenses of his foreign

tours to propagate his mission, but Vivekananda politely declined. The Swami was also responsible in easing the tension between the Arya Samajists and the Muslims. He told them that true religion was meant to unite and not to divide people. In his letter to Sarfaraz Husain, Vivekananda wrote that love was the motivating force behind all religions. He remarked that "without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however, fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam — Vedanta brain and Islam body — is the only hope."[13] He told the detractors of the Muslim rule: "The Muhammadan conquest of India came as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. That is why one-fifth of our people have become Muhammadans." He denied that "it was all the work of sword and fire" and said that to call it so was "the height of madness."[14] Strong words, which indicated his conviction. As Prof Bose has observed, "To him the Muslims were as good and human, and at heart as Indian, as the Hindus. There was affinity between Sufism and Advaita Vedanta. The distinction between them by reason of their different beliefs were subordinate to their identity as fellow countrymen." The Swami was, no doubt, critical of some features of Islam but so was he of Hinduism. He was never dogmatic but a rationalist to the core. He always looked at the better side of every faith. He was a humanist to his fingertips believing in the eternal values which unite all sections of the human race, emphasizing that it will attain salvation only through love and compassion.

10

Sardar Patel

Apart from Shivaji Maharaj and Swami Vivekananda, the Hindu communalists swear by Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and propagate among their people that not Gandhi but the Sardar was the real liberator of India, particularly of Hindus. The Muslims have been made to believe that he was their enemy who wanted to subjugate them. This was said even during the freedom struggle with the result that the Mahatma had to publicly contradict it. He said, "It would be a travesty of truth to describe the Sardar as being anti-Muslim. His heart is so exhaustive that it can accommodate all". I was shocked to learn that a staunch disciple of Gandhiji was misrepresented like this. He was not only a firm believer in the Mahatma's philosophy of non-violence but also a strong upholder of his mission of Hindu-Muslim unity.

Some years ago All-India Radio asked me to deliver their prestigious Sardar Patel Memorial Lectures. I chose the subject: *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*. I made a special study of his life and career to understand his approach to Hindu-Muslim relations. I divided the subject in two parts. The first lecture dealt with the Sardar's attitude to Indian Muslims before Partition and the second on his role after Partition. Both the lectures were later published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in a book and had a wonderful response. They have also been translated into several languages. The Urdu edition contains an appreciative foreword by the distinguished poet Ali Sardar Jafri.

I had the privilege of meeting the Sardar only once; it happened some time after my return from London, where I had lived for five years (1944 to 1948) for my post-graduate work. Those were turbulent days; apart from my studies, I was actively involved in the India League of V.K. Krishna Menon and in the premier organization of Indian students, known as the Federation of Indian Students' Societies in Great Britain and Europe of which I was then the Chairman. Almost a year after my return from London, I received a letter from V.Y. Tonpe, private secretary to the then Home Minister of Bombay, Morarji Desai informing me that India's Deputy Prime Minister would be pleased to see me at Birla House, Bombay. The date was May 19, 1950 and the time given was 10 a.m. I was alone with the Sardar for more than an hour; he was lying in bed as he was not in the best of health. He discussed with me the Hindu-Muslim problem, in particular the attitude of the

younger Muslim generation. He listened patiently to my apprehensions and then asked me to impress upon my young co-religionists the need to get rid of the barriers that Jinnah and the Muslim League had built in dividing the two communities. He was worried about the impact on the Muslims of the Two-Nation theory that had caused Partition. His advice to me was to activitise them in a way that they would be inspired by the same spirit that prevailed during the Khilafat movement in the twenties; this spirit, unfortunately, had been replaced by "suspicion, ill-will and hostility". He asked me to work for creating "mutual trust between Hindus and Muslims which alone could ensure them peace and prosperity". The goodwill of the majority, he said, "was the best safeguard for a minority". I expected that he would be aggressive and even angry against the Muslims for their part in Partition but he was not only surprisingly calm but almost patronizing and without the least rancour. His words had a deep impact on me; I came back more hopeful about the future of Indian Muslims.

During the freedom struggle no one ever accused him of any kind of communal bias. Politically he treated Hindus and Muslims alike, though socially he felt more at ease with the Hindus. But after the rise of the Muslim League under the leadership of Jinnah, in 1937, his attitude changed. He began to doubt the bonafides of the Muslims; he felt they had little interest in uniting with the Hindus. In the result, his attitude towards them hardened, especially during the forties. The

struggle for Pakistan and its eventual creation made him bitter against them. Some of his own colleagues accused him of being a communalist; among them were Maulana Azad and Jayaprakash Narayan. Even Rajaji wrote in *Swarajya* : "A myth had grown about Patel that he would be harsh towards Muslims. This was a wrong notion but it was the prevailing prejudice."[1]

Take the early years of his public life, when the Sardar was the master of Gujarat. Did he show any trace of prejudice against the Muslims? The litmus test came, when Gandhiji decided to collaborate with the Ali Brothers – Maulana Shaukat Ali and Maulana Mohamed Ali, on the question of, what then came to be known as the Khilafat wrong. It was the betrayal by the British of the promise given by their Prime Minister Lloyd George to the Indian Muslims that their holiest places in Mecca and Medina, including the Kaaba, would not be taken away from the Ottoman Khalifa, who was then their custodian, on the defeat of Turkey in World War I (1914-18). That promise was not kept and the Muslims became apprehensive that the Kaaba would be desecrated or handed over to an agent of the British. The Muslim world, particularly south and central Asia, seethed with resentment.

The Ali Brothers took the lead in organizing protests by Indian Muslims. Gandhiji felt that the Hindus should join the Muslims in their hour of need; most Congress leaders disagreed with him. They felt that Khilafat, being a religious issue, should not be mixed with politics. The Mahatma took a different view. He said that the Hindus should not remain

aloof from the Muslims on an issue which had so grievously hurt them. Being a deeply religious man, he respected the religious feelings of others. These transcended political considerations. He insisted, therefore, that the Hindus should stand by the Muslims in their fight against the British. The Congress vacillated; but the Mahatma stuck to his stand. The Muslims took him to their hearts and offered to follow his lead. That was how the first massive non-cooperation movement against the British was launched from the historic Khilafat House in Bombay on August 1, 1920, the day Tilak died. It received tremendous popular support; the Raj was shaken. Of all his disciples it was Patel who instinctively followed the Mahatma; in fact he became the torch-bearer of the movement. For two decades, through various phases of the freedom struggle, the Sardar remained steadfast in his loyalty to Gandhiji and his mission of Hindu-Muslim unity.

However, there was a sea change in his attitude when Jinnah propagated his Two-Nation theory and demanded a separate homeland for the Muslims. The response of the Muslims to Jinnah upset the Sardar. His growing popularity among them disheartened him. It brought about a rapid transformation in his approach towards them. He openly accused them of damaging the fabric of communal harmony which Gandhiji had so assiduously built. The subsequent events, leading to Partition, confirmed in him this conviction. Patel believed in the rough and tumble of politics; constitutional niceties bored him; prolonged negotiations with

the Muslim League irritated him. Jinnah's constant attacks on the Congress, describing it as a fascist Hindu organization, and his emphasis on Hindu-Muslim differences in every walk of their lives, infuriated him. Further, Jinnah's tactics shocked him. He could not understand how Maulana Azad, so deeply steeped in Islam, was unable to counter the influence of a man who was not even a practising Muslim and who openly defied the canons and rituals of his religion. And how the Muslims followed Jinnah instead of Azad who was respected throughout the Muslim world. This upset him deeply.

Nevertheless, there was no hatred against them in his heart; this became evident when Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Ahmedabad. He was then languishing in Yervada jail. The news came as a personal blow to him. On enquiry he was told that these riots were deliberately engineered by some British officers. He felt that his own city, where he had worked so hard for communal harmony should have been immune to such machinations. He wrote in a mood of grave depression to Mahadev Desai on May 11, 1941: "I cannot understand how it has come about that our people have been so unnerved... The only reason, it seems to me, why the ordinary people have lost their nerve is that our own workers seemed to have cared for their own protection. You will have received full details of what took place. We cannot of course alter what has already happened and it is no use crying over spilt milk. But we must think of the future and find out the solution. We will have to pass through very difficult times hereafter, and it

would be foolish on our part to look for help from a Government whom we are fighting. I have no doubt you will have given thought to this matter. Things have not yet settled down in Bombay. I hope things have quietened down in Patna. It seems as if there has been a veritable epidemic of communal riots. That which we were afraid of has happened. God's will will be done."[2]

On his release, he told the thousands of workers gathered at the Congress House at Ahmedabad: "The wounds that were inflicted on me, deep down within me, when I heard of what took place during the riots in this city, have still not been healed. I have not been able to reconcile to it as yet. What possessed you so suddenly that you started cutting each other's throats? Some hundred innocent men died for no reason. If even ten had been bold enough to stand up to the miscreants, this would not have happened. I must tell you that Gandhiji was deeply hurt, for Ahmedabad had made him look foolish. You then approached the Government and asked for enquiry!... In future do not ever run away. Put up the defence. The whole world is doing that. If you can, face your enemy with a superior force, i.e. Gandhiji's path of non-violence. Whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim, stand up and face your enemy, but do not seek to excuse your cowardliness on the ground of non-violence. During these riots there was no sign of non-violence. We have made non-violence an excuse for our cowardice."[3]

Though Azad had differences with Patel, just before his death in 1958, he told his collaborator, Humayun Kabir, as

reported in *The Statesman*, that he should have proposed Patel as the Congress President in 1946 instead of Nehru who was Azad's closest friend. Had he done so, Azad confided in Kabir, the Mahatma would have later made the Sardar, the Prime Minister. Patel, Azad felt, would have done a better job of it than Nehru.

During the British Cabinet Mission's stay in Delhi, Jinnah requested the Aga Khan to be a mediator between him and Patel. The Aga Khan readily agreed and used all his charm, eloquence and influence to persuade the Sardar to meet Jinnah but the Sardar refused. He told the Aga Khan that Jinnah had, all along, abused the Congress and the Hindus "in season and out of season"; he always played the game of hide and seek to avoid a settlement. The Aga Khan said that Jinnah had changed; he was "now in a better frame of mind." "Does a scorpion ever change its colour", Patel asked.

At first many in the Congress were against the acceptance of the Cabinet Mission's Plan; they did not like the three-tier legislative pattern grouping the provinces into three sub-federations, one consisting of the Hindu-majority group and the other two, the Muslim-majority groups; but later, after further discussions with the Viceroy Lord Wavell and the members of the Cabinet Mission, Patel was converted and he was able to dispel the misgivings of the members of the Congress Working Committee about it. He persuaded them to accept the Plan in the larger interest of the unity of India. Azad quickly conveyed the decision to the Viceroy. The main opposition had come from the Hindus in Assam, who were grouped with

the Muslim-majority province of Bengal. But grouping was an integral part of the Plan which made the League accept it. The Sardar realized this and so urged its opponents to be reasonable. In a letter dated June 12, 1946 to one of them he wrote: "I do not think it is wise to open up these matters (compulsory grouping and para 19 of the Plan) at this stage. If we find the Plan otherwise satisfactory and the interim arrangement, which is a part of it, is made to our satisfaction, it would be wise to accept the proposals."[4] Rajaji, who was all for the acceptance of the Plan, revealed that it was because of the "firm and thoughtful stand" of the Sardar that the Congress accepted it. As soon as Jinnah heard of the decision of the Congress, he conveyed the League's acceptance to the Viceroy.

The development naturally roused both joy and hope in political circles; every one felt that at long last the unity of India was saved; but then something happened, which, according to Azad, "reversed the course of history". Nehru had by then replaced Azad as the Congress President, and at his first press conference at Bombay on July 10, 1946 after assuming the new position, Nehru declared that the Congress would enter the Constituent Assembly "completely unfettered" and would be free to change or modify the Cabinet Mission's Plan. He explained that there was every possibility that the two groups, which would have the Muslim majority, would "decide against grouping." He went still further and added, "In betting language there is a four-to-one chance of the North-

West Frontier deciding against grouping in the north-west and Assam in the north-east." This meant that the sub-federations consisting of the Muslim majority groups, would not come into existence because Assam, with its Hindu majority and the N.W.F., with its Muslim majority would not join it. This torpedoed the whole Plan, so laboriously put forth by the Cabinet Mission and unanimously accepted by both the Congress and the League.

Jinnah reacted instantly; he withdrew the League's acceptance of the Plan, saying that the Congress President had repudiated its very basis. The Sardar was downcast; in a sharp letter to his friend D.P. Mishra on July 29, 1946 he wrote: "Though the president (Nehru) has been elected for the fourth time, he often acts with child-like innocence which puts us all in great difficulties unexpectedly. You have good reason to be angry but we must not allow our anger to get the better of ourselves... He has done many things recently which have caused us great embarrassment... his press conference immediately after the AICC are all acts of emotional insanity and it puts tremendous strain on us to set matters right. His mind has been exhausted by overwork and strain. He feels lonely and he acts emotionally and we have to bear the circumstances. Opposition sometimes drives him mad as he is impractical."[5] Gandhiji agreed with the Sardar. He was then resting at Panchgani in Maharashtra and told Jayaprakash Narayan that Nehru's "rash statement had dashed all hopes of settlement on the basis of undivided India". The result was

Partition which both Nehru and Patel eventually accepted much against the wishes of Gandhiji; it was the biggest blunder that the Congress committed; Nehru first gave in and later Patel felt compelled to do so. However both regretted their decision soon thereafter but unfortunately the die was cast. Partition brought disaster after disaster; its aftermath was so horrendous that civil war would have been a far better solution. By creating Pakistan, India put her own security and stability in permanent danger.

The Sardar was no less miserable than Gandhiji at the brutal and inhuman happenings in the wake of Partition; at first he had felt that it was best to cut off a diseased limb; but subsequently he realized that in the process the body itself had got permanently deformed. Even before the healing started, cases of loot, arson, rape and murder shocked him. He had never realized that the consequences would be so terrible; He admitted woefully, rather too late, that the cure had proved worse than the disease. He said in a statement to the press on August 8, 1947: "You cannot divide the sea or the waters of the river. As for the Muslims they have their roots, their sacred places and their centres here. I do not know what they can possibly do in Pakistan. It will not be long before they return to us."[6] That proved to be wishful thinking.

After Partition, when the Sardar became the Deputy Prime Minister, holding the portfolio of Home he spared no one, Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, who indulged in any kind of wrong doing. He did everything in his power to provide as much to

the helpless Muslims as to Hindu and Sikh refugees. He appointed a Muslim as the Inspector General of Special Police Force; and another Muslim as the first Chief Commissioner of Delhi. He asked the Hindu and Sikh refugees not to cause any trouble to the Muslims. He reminded them that "there are 70 million Muslims in India; it is our business to see that they are safe and free". He deprecated the Two-Nation theory and declared "our problem number one is to disprove Jinnah and his teachings".[7] He added: "Butchery of innocent and defenceless men, women and children does not behove brave men; it is the war of the jungle and the hallmark of inhumanity and barbarity. There will be occasions and opportunities for all of you to show your zest for fight; one must seek for it on one's ground and suitable time. It is no time to be foolhardy or desperate but time to reflect calmly on your course of action. We have won our freedom to make our country great and prosperous, not to destroy what little has been vouchsafed to us by our alien rulers." He concluded by reminding them that the lives of millions were at stake; these could not be thrown away to satisfy the spirit of vengeance or retaliation. He appealed to them to maintain peace and "break the vicious circle of attack and counter-attack, retaliation and counter-retaliation."[8]

There was constant pressure on Patel to declare India a Hindu state especially as Pakistan had become a Muslim state. He told B.M.Birla who had strongly advocated such a step: "I do not think it will be possible to consider India as a Hindu

state with Hinduism as a state religion. We must not forget that there are other minorities whose protection is our primary responsibility."[9] Numerous instances have been recorded by senior civil and police officers about the Sardar taking them to task in case of failure on their part to protect the poor and innocent Muslims, targeted by Hindu fanatics. V. Shankar has narrated how the Sardar rushed out one night to save the Dargah of Nizamuddin Auliya in South Delhi which was taken over by some Hindu miscreants; on hearing of it, Patel wrapped his shawl around his shoulders and told his Private Secretary: "Let us go to the saint, before we incur his displeasure."[10] Similar heart-rendering accounts to save Muslims in distress have been recorded by K.B.Lal, H.M.Patel and other high ranking I.C.S. officers who worked under Patel during those critical times. He castigated the Muslims for partitioning India but did not spare the Hindus for unnecessarily harassing and persecuting them. There is also the testimony of no less an antagonist of the Sardar than Choudhary Khaliquzzaman who records in his book *Pathway to Pakistan* about the firmness with which Patel saved the besieged Muslims in Delhi. He appealed to the Hindus to give up their distrust of the Muslims. He said: "If you think you can go on constantly troubling loyal Muslims because they happen to be Muslims, then our freedom is not worthwhile."[11]

As Minister of Information and Broadcasting, the portfolio which he held simultaneously with Home, the Sardar had to deal with the problem of Urdu; He wrote in a note: "As

regards Urdu, I am doubtful of either the propriety or the wisdom of relegating it entirely to the regional domain. In a sense, Urdu like Hindi, cannot belong to one region. Those who speak and understand this language are not concentrated in one geographical area. To this extent, Urdu differs from other regional languages. You cannot confine it to any one particular region though you can say that it is mainly spoken in a large portion of Northern India."[12] He asked his officers, therefore, to include Urdu as one of the main languages of AIR stations in some provinces and added: "I feel that, if we have to make AIR effective as an instrument of publicity and promotion of ideals of a secular state and culture amongst a large majority of Muslims and refugees, we must, for the time being, assign a portion of our AIR programme from Delhi (at national level) to Urdu."[13] According to S.Gopal, whose three-volume biography of Nehru has become a classic, and who is quite critical of the Sardar, "Patel is usually depicted as a supporter of Hindu chauvinism, but actually his major concern was national unity".[14] Gopal has even observed that Prasad was more non-secular than Patel.

Presenting the unanimous report of the committee on minorities as its Chairman to the Constituent Assembly, the Sardar reminded the Hindus that the minorities had entrusted them with a sacred trust when they so willingly agreed to give up Separate Electorate; the Hindus, therefore, should give them through general electorate their due representation. He warned them: "that a discontented minority is a burden and a

danger and that we must not do anything to injure the feelings of any minority so long as it is not unreasonable." He said: "It is upto the majority community, by its generosity, to create a sense of confidence in the minorities."[15] Turning towards the Hindu members, he told them: "It is for us who happen to be in a majority to think about what the minorities feel and imagine; how we would feel if we were treated in the manner in which they are treated."[16]

The Sardar was not opposed to the preservation of the identities of the Muslims and other minorities; on the contrary on three matters which were of supreme importance to them, he took a firm stand, despite the pressure of many Hindu leaders. These were: (1) the right to propagate their religion; (2) the right to preserve their language, script and culture; and (3) the right to run their educational institutions. As the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Minorities and Fundamental Rights, these came directly under him. Much heat was generated among the members, in particular on giving the right to non-Hindus to proselytize. Christian and Muslim members were adamant on it; they said it was a vital part of their religion. The Hindus, on the other hand, were dead against it. They pointed out that even the 1931 Karachi Session of the Congress, over which the Sardar himself had presided, had only guaranteed to a citizen "the right freely to profess and practise his religion" and not "to propagate it". K.M. Munshi and Purushottam Das Tandon, both closest to the Sardar, argued vehemently against the incorporation of

the word, 'propagate'; this would, they said, open the floodgate of conversion by various kinds of inducements. Tandon said that it was "very improper to convert from one religion to another" and totally wrong to allow it. The Christian and Muslim members emphasised that "propagation" was an article of faith with them.

As was his practice, the Sardar listened patiently to members on both the sides; but expressed no opinion. Meanwhile a delegation of some of the leading members of the minorities met Nehru and pleaded for their right to propagate their religion. Nehru was sympathetic but told them frankly that he did not believe in organized religion and so he was unable to appreciate its propagation. But this was, he said, his personal view; they should discuss it with Patel who would be more appreciative of their sentiments and do the needful. The Sardar heard them with patience when they saw him next. He was amused at what Nehru had told them. He assured them, however, that he would do whatever he could to help them out. Thus, despite strong opposition from the Hindu members, he exerted all his prestige and influence to get the word "propagate" incorporated in the relevant Article (25) of the Constitution.

Likewise it was because of the Sardar's persuasion, that the Constituent Assembly passed articles (29) and (30) which have guaranteed to the minorities, the right to conserve their "distinct language, script and culture" and "to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice." These

constitute the arsenal of their rights as enshrined in Chapter III of the Constitution which is enforceable by the courts. It is a pity that this remarkable contribution of the Sardar to the strengthening of secularism in India has not been properly appreciated; had he not put all his weight behind their incorporation, the minorities might not have been given the right to maintain their identity in India.

In the last year of his life, Patel gave yet another proof that he was not anti-Muslim; this was in the case of Justice Bashir Ahmed of the Madras High Court whom the Government of India had proposed as a permanent judge of the Madras High Court. Chief Justice Kania of the Supreme Court of India negated the proposal. Patel instructed Home Secretary H.V.R. Iyengar to go ahead with the appointment disregarding Kania's objection. He told Kania on the telephone that any rejection of Justice Bashir Ahmed at this stage could reasonably be regarded as arising "out of prejudice against the Muslims". It would be unwise to give such an impression, he added.

Patel was, however, not much enamoured of the concept of secularism; he used the word rarely; its western connotation, which downgraded religion, was not much to his liking. Though not a deeply religious man, he was proud of his Hindu heritage. But like his master, his Hinduism was not narrow; he respected other religions and had no quarrel with the nation's composite character. But it had to harmonize with the mainstream; the minorities had to so adjust themselves as to be an integral part of it. He could not understand their fear

that in the process, their identity might suffer. He was totally opposed to the establishment of a Hindu rashtra; whenever anyone talked about it, he brushed it aside by saying that it could never work. He was sure that this country, in the remoulding of which the Sardar played such a vital part, would never subscribe to it. In his unforgettable words: "It will kill the soul of India."

Tough, determined, uncompromising and even unforgiving at times, the Sardar was never vengeful; nor did he entertain hatred or prejudice against anyone. In the words of Wordsworth:

In him the savage virtue of the race,
Revenge and ferocious thoughts were dead;
Nor did he change; but kept in lofty place
The wisdom which adversity had bred.

11

What Should Muslims Do?

How should Indian Muslims cope with the rising rage of communal Hindus? There is great deal of anxiety among them. Many of them have come to believe there is little they can do to save themselves.

Hindus are 85 per cent and Muslims only 12. Hindus have all the sinews of power – the government, the army, the police, the public and the private sectors; all are ranged against them. So far the villages were immune to the communal virus; but now they are also contaminated by it. How can a minority face such a formidable combination?

Out of sheer frustration, Prof. Fuzail Jafferey quoted Ghalib's couplet in his editorial in *Inquilab*, one of the most widely read Urdu newspapers:

Koyee ummeed bar nahee aatee
Koyee surat nazar nahee aatee

No hope seems to be fulfilled
No solution appears on the horizon.

Many years before the genocide of Muslims in Gujarat, I wrote in my book *The Widening Divide*, published by Penguin: "For the first time Muslims are unable to react; they have neither the capacity nor the will. They are despondent and depressed; they are uncertain of the future. As facts and figures have disclosed, they are so down and out that nothing stirs them. They seem to be resigned to their lot. Hindus feel no sympathy for them; on the contrary they will be happy to be rid of these 'troublesome creatures.' India, they think, will be much better off without them. There is no desire on either side to forget the past and be friends; it has been attempted before and what was the result, both ask. Hindus are swept along by the rising tide of Hindutva; they are not willing to make any adjustments with the Muslims."

Though relations between the two communities have worsened since then as a result of the systematic indoctrination of hate carried out by certain sections of the communal Hindus against Muslims, I hope the madness that gripped the militant Hindus in Gujarat will not be repeated; even the firebrand sanyasin Uma Bharati has spoken strongly against it. She said: "The rise of intolerance among the Hindu youth and the fact that they are unapologetic about such inhuman acts is a cause for great concern. That such elements — even if small in number — exist among Hindus is terrible. They must be destroyed from

the roots."[1] There are in fact many Hindus who are deeply upset at the gruesome happenings in Gujarat and are determined to save India from such communal scourge; they are more alert now than ever before. They remain determined and undaunted to protect India's multi-religious pluralism. They include leaders of secular parties, intellectuals of all hues and mediapersons — reporters, photographers, cameramen, commentators, editors and proprietors of leading English and language newspapers; the electronic media, in particular, played a heroic role indeed. All of them exhibited rare courage in hostile conditions, providing a ray of hope for the future; they were hell-bent to ensure that the legacy of broad humanism which is the kernel of Hinduism, should not be destroyed. They seem however to be in a minority; the communal Hindus are on the rise.

In this situation, what should Indian Muslims do? Confrontation has only worsened relations; it has done no good to the Muslims. The only alternative, after 55 years of bitter experience is for them to change their entire outlook in tackling issues which are plaguing both communities. Emphasis on differences must go. Muslims must try and become an integral part of the mainstream. This does not mean their identity needs to be submerged or compromised but they must wholeheartedly collaborate in enriching composite nationalism which continues to be our pride. For this, they must get out of their ghetto mentality, break the barriers of alienation and generate a harmonious environment.

They should do some introspection and ask whether they have genuinely tried to contribute to the strengthening of Hindu-Muslim relations since Partition. The answer will be, no. I am afraid their so-called leaders took them on the wrong path. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-98) was much distressed after the revolt of 1857 when the British had targeted the Muslims with a vengeance. He advised them, in the teeth of opposition from the elite and the religious leaders, to befriend the British and advocated more social contact with them. He even wrote a pamphlet on how Muslims should dine with Christians. He urged Muslims to take to English education so that the bridge between them and the rulers could be narrowed; that would facilitate them in dealing with the ruling class. He discouraged them from getting involved in agitational activities; he opposed their joining the newly formed Indian National Congress on the ground that the suspicion of the British against them might be revived. His efforts paid rich dividends.

I feel the time has now come when Muslims will have to once again adopt the same course of action. The situation then and now may not be the same but there is much wisdom in what the great Sayyid said and did in order to take Muslims out of the slough of despondency and put them on the road to recovery. The same needs to be done now. Let us first examine what are the things that have spoilt Hindu-Muslim relations. There is first the historical baggage that Muslims have to carry but they can do little about it except make it clear that they should not be victimized for whatever some Muslim rulers did

in the past. Then there are the religious misconceptions which have been so widely spread against Muslims that they need to be properly explained and removed; lastly there are the issues which their leaders are fond of raising but which have nothing to do with the day to day life of Muslims; they have provided them with no relief; on the contrary these have done them more harm and in fact provoked a severe backlash.

But when emotions are surcharged and wounds are raw, to make suggestions which may not be palatable, can cause resentment. The ire may even invite the charge of betrayal or a "sell out". That is what exactly happened to Sir Sayyid; his opponents went to Mecca and obtained a fatwa against him from the Grand Mufti, declaring that the Sayyid deserved to be killed because he had worked against Muslims, violating the tenets of Islam. He was, however, a courageous man who neither faltered nor failed; such attacks did not deter him from going ahead. There is unfortunately no such leader in our midst today; but even without such a leader an awareness has to be created in the community that his example needs to be followed if the present generation has to be rescued from the plight which is worse than what Muslims faced during the time of the Sayyid.

The most worrisome factor, which vitiates intercommunal relations, is the recurrence of Hindu-Muslim riots; statistics prove that there have been more riots in Free India than in the hundred and fifty years of the British raj. And these have been far more virulent too. Earlier both communities suffered

equally, now most of the victims are Muslims. Apart from the death and destruction that are caused, riots paralyse the entire community. They are completely uprooted and though rehabilitation is promised no government — regardless of the party to which it belongs — has ever done anything to really uplift them. This has been confirmed by the eminent jurist, V.R. Krishna Iyer, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India who said: "In all major communal riots, the members of the minority community have been invariably the worst sufferers and they get no justice."[2]

Moreover the authorities and the police have never given them the necessary security. Every government has put away the recommendations of every commission of enquiry to rust on the shelf. Should not the Muslims now take a realistic view and think how best they can help build bridges with the Hindus and forget to rely on either the Government or the commissions and courts who have failed to provide them protection or succour? The only safeguard for Muslims today seems to be the creation of a congenial and harmonious atmosphere which may prevent the recurrence of riots.

After the terrible carnage in Gujarat, Indian Muslims must open their eyes to the ground reality that an increasing number of Hindus have begun to hate them. There may be other reasons for it also. The politics of the struggle for Partition, the propagation of the Two-Nation theory by Jinnah and the increasingly hostile role of Pakistan against India. As I have explained in my latest book: *The Man Who Divided India*,

instead of freeing Muslims from Hindu domination as Jinnah had claimed, he has, to use his words, put them permanently under Hindu domination. The mess he created has been so vicious that Muslims in divided India have been unable to get out of it.

They went through the most heart-rending agony soon after Partition. Harassed and humiliated they rushed to Maulana Azad whom they had discarded during the movement for Pakistan and begged of him to rescue them from their plight. Azad told them in words which are as relevant today as they were when he spoke to them: "Do you remember I hailed you, you cut off my tongue. I picked up my pen, you severed my hand. I wanted to move forward, you cut off my legs. I tried to turn over, and you injured my back... I called upon you to wake you up at every danger signal. You did not heed my call... I warned you that the Two-Nation theory was a death-knell to a meaningful, dignified life; forsake it. I told you that the pillars upon which you were leaning would inevitably crumble. To all this you turned a deaf ear...Time sped along. And now you have discovered that the so-called anchors of your faith have set you adrift, to be kicked around by fate..."[3]

As years passed their condition further deteriorated; they lost their political clout and slipped into unprecedented backwardness both educationally and economically.

But unfortunately their self-serving leaders, with utter disregard to the aftermath of Partition, remained oblivious to their miserable decline and continued to behave with

incredible arrogance, exhibiting a sense of false bravado by their loud utterances; they take out protest marches at the slightest pretext, hold demonstrations, shout slogans, demand justice and fair play but all this never gives any relief to the community. They put up one fight after another with the authorities on irrelevant issues which often provoke more hostility than goodwill. They fail to understand that by voicing meaningless grievances, asking for unrealistic rights, wailing, fretting and fuming, the leaders may gain some publicity but the community loses a great deal. They quote the constitution and demand the implementation of this provision or that, guaranteed to the minorities but none of it gives Muslims the required protection; even democracy is ranged heavily against them because under it numbers count.

There is the glaring instance of Urdu; since it is spoken largely by Muslims, it has been victimized and Muslims have been unable to do anything about it. Memorandums and petitions signed by lakhs of them were presented to the Government for the protection of the language. To win the votes of Muslims, occasional promises were made by several leading political parties. The Gujral Committee was constituted to look into the grievances. The Committee's report created a lot of hype but it has proved to be just an eyewash. It was tossed and turned around by every government but nothing worthwhile came of it. Even when Inder Kumar Gujral, the celebrated author of the report, became Prime Minister, none of its recommendations were implemented. The tragedy is that

Indian Muslims get pleased and excited with mere gestures; they don't realize that what matters, in any situation, is the result. Similarly the Urdu academies, floated by State governments might have financially helped a few budding poets and authors, but, by and large, they have been ineffective in preventing the steady decline of Urdu; the same is true of the Minorities Commissions; none of them have been able to redress the grievances of Muslims. All these measures have been merely gimmicks to appease Muslims, rather than provide them any substantial protection, assistance or relief. An in-depth review of all these much-propagated institutions will bare the truth.

Muslims are reduced to barely 12 per cent now. Before Partition, they were 33 per cent and Hindus were less than 70 per cent. In British India, in five out of eleven provinces they had their own governments and even at the Centre, being one-third of the total population, they occupied a decisive position. Thanks to Jinnah, all that is lost. Indian Muslims must therefore take stock of these facts and find out whether the course their leaders have so far adopted even after Partition has been right. Has it done them any good? If not, should such leaders be allowed to continue functioning on the same lines or should they be made to change their way and chart out another, not only to save Muslims from the depressed state in which they find themselves but also to help them readjust to the pressures of the times so that they too could share the benefits that the country has to offer.

Besides, have these leaders and their hold on different sections of Muslims ever been tested? Have their credentials been verified? They revel in defiance but defiance, without the strength to succeed, is self-destructive. The Quran glorifies the use of *hikmat* or wisdom; it prohibits confrontation, except in self-defence. The Prophet always preached tolerance; he worked for collaboration even with his antagonists. Have these leaders ever followed him in this regard? Have they ever paused to ascertain the ill-effects of their behaviour on Muslims as a whole? Their uncompromising and rigid attitude on every occasion has only weakened Hindu-Muslim relations further.

I wonder if I am right in attacking the venerable leaders. I am reminded of a couplet by Javed Akhtar:

Main jaanta hoon ke khamoshi main hee maslehat hai
Magar yeh maslehat meiray dil ko khal rahee hai

All virtue comes from silence, so I'm told
But that great virtue makes my blood run cold

The poet admits that it is not easy to bare the truth; it needs a lot of courage:

Jaane yeh kaisa daur hay jismein ye jurrat bhi mushkil hai
Din ho agar tau usko likhoon din, raat agar ho,raat likhoon

In this age why is it so difficult to say what is right
Can't I declare that day is day, and night is night?

I am reminded of a poem by Deputy Nazir Ahmed, the great litterateur; it was addressed to Muslims when they were mired in more or less a similar situation:

Kuch na poocho aaj hum lecture may kya kehne ko hain
Quom ko khud quom kay munh pur bura kehne ko hain
Muddaton hum ne unko chupkay chupkay samjhaya kiya
Ab jo kuch kehno ke hain, so barmala kehne ko hain.

Do not ask, what I will say in my discourse today,
I shall reproach the community on its face;
For years, we have been quietly making them understand
But now, whatever is to be said, must be said with forthrightly.

Indian Muslims must now see the light of day and move in a different direction which will take them forward and not backward. They must discard their worn-out prejudices and outmoded habits and adjust themselves to the requirements of the changing times. They must harness their inner strength and learn to be self reliant. They must give up asking for doles which will only cripple them. In order to survive, they must learn to stand on their own feet. For the fact is it that they have no true friends; many of those who show them sympathy or consideration are not sincere. They do so only to obtain some electoral gain. This has been proved time and time again but only the wise take the hint and correct themselves.

Muslims rely on India's commitment to secularism but it has not proved to be of much help. Nor have Muslims of other countries ever come to their rescue. The well-known columnist Thomas L. Friendman has asked a pertinent question: "Why is it that when Hindus kill hundreds of Muslims it elicits an emotionally muted headline in the Arab media but when Israel

kills a dozen Muslims, in a war in which Muslims are also killing Jews, it inflames the entire Muslim world?" Then there are the religious extremists, patronized mostly by Pakistan who spread terror everywhere and bring shame and disgrace to their co-religionists. Their gruesome actions further alienate Muslims from non-Muslims. They pull Muslims out of the confines of modern life with the result they are shunted out from everywhere. Furthermore the suicidal rage of these fanatics, as a critic has said, is dragging down one of the finest civilizations that the human race ever witnessed. President Musharraf has himself realized now that these jihadis are causing havoc everywhere including in Pakistan. Even so they are still supported and financed by a number of leading Pakistani religious groups who encourage them to secretly infiltrate into India and commit murderous operations mostly against innocent Hindus. They masquerade as freedom fighters and believe that they would compel India to give Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. Only the insane can indulge in such hallucinations.

Incidentally, with what face does Pakistan ask for talks with India with the jihadis continuing with their bombings and killings? Of what use can any negotiations be in such a murderous atmosphere? The world is naturally anxious because of the nuclear apprehensions but the General in Pakistan must first bring cross-border terrorism to a halt; it destroys all hopes of establishing any peaceful relationship between the two

countries. Musharraf is being hypocritical for he himself has told his people bluntly: "We claim it [Islam] is the most tolerant of faiths. How does the world judge our claim? It looks upon us as terrorists. We have been killing each other. And now we want to spread that violence and terror abroad. Naturally, the world regards us as terrorists... One hears the boast that we will hoist our flag on the Red Fort. We will do this, we will do that. Have you ever thought of the consequences of such talk for Muslims in India."[4]

By their brutal killings the jihadis have made the life of ordinary Muslims in India most uncomfortable; the communal Hindus suspect, even if unjustifiably, that many Muslims nurse some sympathy in their hearts for the terrorists. This is totally baseless, but the Muslim leaders do little to rebut the impression. They know that the issue of Jammu and Kashmir is in some way linked with Indian Muslims; any settlement with Pakistan is bound to have repercussions on Hindu-Muslim relations. But instead of coming out openly against Pakistan and taking a strong stand against the jihadis, these so-called guardians of Indian Muslims spend most of their time in running their own political shops to buttress their communal leadership.

Some of them often whip up religious frenzy which only further inflames communal tension and, in the end generates more illwill among the Hindus. The worst affected by such tactics have been the Muslims in the rural areas who constitute more than 70 per cent of the Muslim population in India.

They are troubled and distrusted by their Hindu neighbours for no fault of theirs; consequently they have developed a fear complex which makes them incapable of leading a peaceful life. The Muslims in urban areas manage to shout and agitate; they are even able to make some ripples but what is the end result? None of these leaders visit villages so they are unaware of the fallout of their actions on the poor and hapless who live in the remote parts of the country.

There are no doubt some Hindus whose hearts bleed for Muslims; but what sustains hatred among large sections of Hindus against Muslims is the intellectual justification for it by several leading Hindu intellectuals who proudly speak on the distinction between "us" and "them". The Nobel laureate V. S. Naipaul denounces Muslims *en masse* and justifies the vengeance that has spread against them. This is not confined to a small section; it has infected the rich as much as the poor; men as much as women; the young as much as the old; even children are no longer free from it. Parents are indoctrinating them into a strange Muslim phobia; even teachers in schools and lecturers in colleges use the worst epithets against Muslims.

Khushwant Singh, the most widely read commentator, has expressed his horror at the contempt with which the enlightened Hindus speak about Muslims: "This can be seen in the most sophisticated circles of Delhi: in the best of clubs, diplomatic receptions and cocktail parties of the cream of the capital's society. When they talk of Muslims or Islam, they make snide remarks, innuendos and have smirky smiles on

their ugly faces—Shrimans and Shrimatis alike. There are times I feel like flinging the contents of my glass of whiskey in their faces and walking out."[5]

This is the ugly reality that Muslims have to face in today's India. They have to do their best to bring about a change in the hostile attitude of the communal Hindus towards them. This is as much in their interest as that of the nation. Muslims continue to live in a make-believe world of their own. Their leaders waste their energies in playing games, whipping up emotions, and bringing more trouble to the ordinary Muslims. Besides them, there are other "warriors," who are ever ready to take cudgels on behalf of the community – priests, academics, journalists who add fuel to the fire. To quote the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, "The dialectics of confrontation is powerfully fed by intellectual confusion that spreads from the world of academia to the world of journalism."[6] These are inherited habits which refuse to die; but Indian Muslims have to come out of this quagmire and take their proper share in the nation's development.

They must also put the self-appointed champions of their causes and defenders of their faith in their place. They have done them enough harm; they must not be allowed to go on with their confrontationist politics. Though Muslims in India form the largest Muslim population in the world, next only to Indonesia, they are, not like the Muslims in the fifty odd Muslim countries, the rulers but are the ruled. They have neither power nor privileges; they are no longer in a position to fight the

Hindus or get the better of them. Jinnah propagated the Two-Nation theory and Muslims supported him *en masse*. Much earlier Savarkar among some other prominent Hindus had also advocated the same; but the Hindus did not respond to their plea. That is the difference which must be underlined. Gandhi and Nehru had checkmated it. And now Muslims must take the lead to bury this pernicious doctrine and work to unite with the Hindus. Islam, as Rumi told the faithful, came to unite people and not to divide them. The task is not going to be easy because the communal Hindus have now risen to revive Savarkar's long forgotten thesis of Hindus and Muslims being two separate nations and implement it with a vengeance so as to outdo even Jinnah. There are no Gandhis and Nehrus in India now to negate its ill-effect; the task, therefore, is most formidable.

Indian Muslims must, therefore, join hands with liberal Hindus to work zealously for harmony between the two communities; to succeed in this task they need to first change their own behaviour, indeed their entire perception. They must so conduct themselves as to conform to the requirements of the changing circumstances; the need to preserve a multi-religious environment is urgent as well as basic to the preservation of secularism. By their conduct they must gather more and more Hindus on their side. This is as important as safeguarding their religious and cultural heritage. There need be no clash in pursuing both these obligations. But the will and determination has to be there; for as Iqbal warned:

Aieenay nau say darna tarzay kohan pay arna
Manzil yehi kathin hai qaumon ki zindagi mein

To fear the new and to hold on to the old,
That is the difficult path in a nation's life.

To succeed, Indian Muslims must boldly come forward to undergo an all-round transformation in their style of functioning. If they neglect or fail to do so then I am afraid to quote Iqbal again, with a slight variation in the couplet, which is more relevant today, they will be ruined.

Na sambhjogey tau mit-jaaogey ai Hindi Musalmanon,
*Tumhaari daastaan tak bhee na hogi daas*tanon mein
O Indian Muslims, if you don't take care of yourself now
Your story will not be there in the human annals.

They must remember the saying, "a hand caught between an anvil and a hammer has no choice." History has unfortunately put them in that position. The younger generation in particular will therefore have to arm itself both educationally and socially, in such a way that despite all odds they can overcome the hurdles and ensure their future. They have the intelligence and the energy, what is needed now is the proper harnessing of these. For them *aaraam* should be *haraam*.
In the words of Iqbal:

Khoon-i-ragay memaar ki garmi say hai taameer
Bey mehnat-i-paiham koyee johar nahee khilta

It is the mason's blood and sweat which builds the edifice
Perpetual labour alone brings out the jewel's lustre.

They will succeed if parents shed their old habits, give up their outdated notions, and encourage and help their sons and daughters to get the best of education; the scope is wide now with the old professions in greater demand and new opportunities provided by computer education and technological information. In the dozen colleges and institutes of higher learning which I have founded, I find Muslim girls are performing better than the boys, ranking in the merit list in University exams. They have charisma, intellect and more importantly, the urge to learn which should be assiduously encouraged.

On their part, the young Muslims must try and acquire excellence and perfection in their chosen fields and so arm themselves that after the completion of their studies they can be frontrunners wherever they go. Merit alone will give them reward; they must never seek patronage. Their future will be assured if their results are commensurate with the task entrusted to them; in that case they will be able to cut across the communal prejudice against them. At the same time they should cultivate an attachment to both their Indian and Islamic heritage, exhibiting pride in them in equal measure. They must face new challenges, boldly and fearlessly. These days Islam has been much distorted by Muslim themselves; its noble values are openly violated by its own votaries for selfish purposes thus shattering its glorious legacy of enlightenment and intellectual

advancement; it is for the young Muslims to revoke the wrong and revive the right.

Islam needs to be projected, in view of the ill-informed propaganda against it, in its true pristine colour — as a dynamic, progressive force which teaches its followers to move forward, never backward. They must, by their forceful and constructive exertions, reclaim Islam's past heritage and bring back the spirit of compassion which some of their greatest saints and philosophers, poets and scientists, fostered through their immemorial works. They brought fraternity where hostility prevailed. Indian Muslims must disarm the jihadis and disown the bigotism which has made Muslims pariahs everywhere. They must, by their example, transmit Islam's message of tolerance and brotherhood to the world and give to the non-Muslims the assurance that their religion stands for "live and let live". Their reformation should rejuvenate Islam and be the beacon light for the rest of the Muslim world which is still mired in obscurantism and totalitarian framework. The values of democracy, human rights and civil liberties that India has nurtured and under which she has flourished should help Indian Muslims to give the right lead to the oppressed Muslims, wherever they be.

They must also direct their energies in taking full advantage of globalization and try to utilise fully their talents to come on the top. That is how the most oppressed have always redeemed their destiny. The Jews were the most prosecuted in the West for many centuries; but they strived hard and fully utilized

their talents. They worked so strenuously that they won laurels in every discipline and achieved distinction in every field. Today they exercise enormous influence in every sector, science, literature, finance and even politics. That is the way to overcome the plight in which circumstances have landed Indian Muslims. They must heed what the Urdu poet Sikandar Ali Wajd told them and aim to reach the highest peak of achievement:

Aghyaar mehr-o-maah say aagay nikal gaye
Uljhe huyae hain, subha ki pehli kiran say hum

Others have gone beyond the moon and the sun
While we are still struggling with the first ray of the sun.

The Quran admonishes the faithful that "God never changes the condition of a people unless they themselves want to change it." Will the Indian Muslims accept the challenge to change and reorientate their mindset?

In the first place they must put their House in order and so equip themselves as to meet the modern requirements. The orthodox clerics who shut themselves up from the world, must not be allowed to lock the Muslims in such a way that they are restrained from going ahead and partaking of the benefits of the technological advancement and the opportunities that the democratic forces offer.

They must, without compromising the Quranic injunctions, agree to the introduction of certain much-needed, essential changes in their Personal Law, particularly the enactment of

monogamy; this will bring them on a par with non-Muslims. It was strongly urged by Justice Ameer Ali and Justice Syed Mahmud in the past and is even today advocated by the ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood. Muhammad Qutb, the brother of Sayyid Qutb opined that it was the preferable Quranic alternative. Surprisingly, it was Jinnah, who on an earlier occasion, pointed out how Muslims cooperated with non-Muslims to accept secular legislation.

He said, "For instance, Islamic criminal law of contract is no more applicable. Islamic criminal law which remained applicable even during the British period now stands wholly repealed. The Islamic law of evidence is nowhere found in this country. Over and above, there is the recently enacted Caste Disabilities Removal Act, 1850 which has the effect of abrogating the Quranic provision under which an apostate is deprived of his right to inheritance. I submit these as examples which we have to follow so that we may keep pace with the present social needs and requirements of the time, for which many precedents are found in the Islamic legal history itself."[7]

Many recent judgements of the various High Courts and the Supreme Court, which alone decide the disputes of Muslim Personal Law, have introduced substantial reforms; these have been quietly accepted by the community. The process must be taken forward; Muslims must not allow themselves to be hidebound by what the classical jurists in the past had ordained.

There is, in fact, enough scope under the Shariah to amend the laws relating to marriage, divorce, dower and even

maintenance. In the law of divorce, as early as in 1939, vital changes were made by the then Central Legislative Assembly by enacting the Dissolution of Muslim Marriages Act, under which a Muslim wife was given the right of divorce under certain circumstances. Dower is in fact a counter to dowry; under it the husband is required to pay a certain amount to the wife at the time of marriage. It is a commitment which has to be honoured by him. Only in regard to inheritance no substantial change is possible nor is it necessary because the Muslim law of inheritance is quite progressive. As I had explained to the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi, why should anyone bother about inheritance when 95 per cent of the Muslims in India die as paupers. The remaining five per cent can do what they like with their inherited assets; why ask them to violate the Quranic injunction?

Ijtihad, (independent thinking) which was freely used by the classical jurists in the past, needs to be exercised by the present generation much more today; this was also actively advocated both by Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Allama Iqbal, who exerted the greatest influence on the thinking of Indian Muslims in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively. They deprecated the Ulamas' emphasis on taqlid or imitation. Both reformers believed that the Quran embodied an essentially dynamic outlook on life and encouraged each generation to chalk out its own course of action, unhampered by the past. Iqbal went to the extent of dismissing the standard works of the Shariah and said that no theologian, however

eminent, had the right to give finality or crystallize legal thought in Islam.

The Allama has categorically declared: "The claim of the present generation of Muslim liberals to re-interpret the foundational legal principles, in the light of their own experience and the altered conditions of modern life is, in my opinion, perfectly justified. The teaching of the Quran that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems."[8]

Likewise the issue of Babri Masjid must be amicably solved; it was badly handled by interested groups with the result that they could not prevent its demolition. Muslim fears on account of the Hindu movement against it did create considerable unease about the preservation of mosques in general; but instead of talking it over with responsible elements among the Hindus, confrontation was adopted to press the point. This gave rise to more hatred against the Muslims, who have now agreed to accept the verdict of the court. Much blood could have been spared if genuine efforts at conciliation were made earlier. Unfortunately neither side tried sincerely; they believed in fighting it out. For almost a decade they have done so; Babri Masjid could not be saved; meanwhile hundreds of mosques and dargahs in Gujarat have been razed to the ground and the same is true of some parts of Maharashtra as well. What have the Muslims leaders really gained by mounting agitation after agitation? Have they been able to protect the

sacred places of the Muslims. A different approach has to be evolved to obtain the desired results.

The controversy on the singing of *Vande mataram* by Muslims is also meaningless. It was sung by all Muslim leaders, belonging to the Congress, during the freedom struggle. In his fight against the Congress in the late thirties of the last century Jinnah raked it up by saying it was against a tenet of Islam, as it calls upon people to prostrate before the mother (land). But it does not; the Sanskrit word means "bow" and not "prostrate". Those Muslims, who do not want to sing it, may not but they must stand up when it is sung as a mark of respect to an anthem which has a hoary past and is declared as a national song in the Constitution. Why add hurt to an already worsening inter-communal relationship.

Hindus are also piqued by the fact that Muslims are multiplying fast, much more than Hindus. The Census figures, decade after decade, confirm it. The two major causes for this disparity are said to be, first, that a Muslim can have four wives at a time and secondly, his reluctance on religious grounds to adopt family planning. A VHP pamphlet propagates it thus: "In order to appease them, the Muslims of India have been allowed to marry four wives, a practice now disallowed even in Muslim countries. As a result, the population of Muslims in India which stood at 25 million at the time of Partition, has shot up to nearly 100 million, whereas the population of Hindus has only doubled since then. According to the findings of the UNO, 25 years hence the Hindu count will shrink to

less than 50 per cent of the country's population since their growth rate is only 23.69 per cent as compared to the 30.85 per cent in the case of Muslims."

This is a gross misrepresentation of the actual facts; it is done with a view to scare the Hindus. Demographers are agreed that even if the rate of growth of Hindus and Muslims continues to be the same, the Muslim population in the next 25 years will rise to 13.55 per cent. To equal the Hindus, Muslims will need no less than 365 years. This, of course, presupposes that religion alone is the cause of higher growth, a fact that has been universally rejected by demographers, who have proved by statistical analysis that the major influence on the fertility behaviour of a people is the socio-economic factor.

In his highly acclaimed study, *Aspects of Fertility: With Special Reference to Developing Countries*, the revered sociologist R.H. Chaudhury has noted: "The observed differences in fertility are mostly due to socio-economic differences between Muslims and other religious groups. Once these differences are accounted for, the fertility differences between Muslims and other religious groups will largely disappear." This is also borne out by the fact that while the fertility rate, both of Hindus and Muslims, is low in economically advanced states like Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat, it is high in both communities in economically backward states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh.

The two most important reasons for higher fertility are poverty and lack of education, especially among women. The

number of infant deaths among Muslims is also much higher than among Hindus which also is a check on population growth. Nevertheless there is the psychological factor, which Muslims must consider in order to reassure the Hindus, however, unjustified their fear may be. It revolves round polygamy which communal Hindus believe is the cause of the multiplication of Muslims. They can easily give it up though according to Prof. Mohan Rao of JNU, the rate of growth has little to do with polygamous marriages. In fact the number of Hindus with more than one wife is higher than that among Muslims.

This is substantiated by figures provided by the Census Commissioner and Registrar General: "In India as a whole, the incidence of polygamous marriages is the highest among the persons declaring their religion as tribal religion (12.25 per cent), next come the Buddhists (7.97 per cent) followed by the Jains (6.72 per cent). Then come caste-Hindus and last, the Muslims. This has also been endorsed by the Anthropological Survey of India which has been carrying on an ambitious project through field investigations into different aspects of human endeavour. After surveying 4,635 communities and sub-communities in nearly 5,500 villages and towns throughout India, the Survey states that the incidence of polygamy is rare among the Muslims because most of them have no money to marry four times."

Hence, the real reason for the increase in the rate of growth of population among Indian Muslims is their growing poverty. There is also the urban-rural disparity; 66 per cent of Muslims

live in urban areas as against 22 per cent Hindus. They are huddled together in slums with no recreational facilities; they live almost like animals. Carnal indulgence seems to be their only pleasure with no understanding of preventive measures which leads to frequent pregnancies. This has been vividly brought out by field surveys conducted by research organizations.

Whatever be the statistics, communal Hindus don't accept them: numbers, they say, can be made to lie. They are, by and large, convinced that polygamy results in an increased rate of growth of people. It is, therefore, not in the interest of Indian Muslims to persist with it which in any case they don't practise. It is also not obligatory for them under the Shariah; the relevant Quranic verse 3 in surah al-Nissa is clear on the point:

> Marry women who seem good to you,
> Two or three or four in number.
> However, if you fear
> That you may not be able to act
> Equitably towards all,
> Then marry only one.

This is followed in the same surah by verse 129 which makes it abundantly clear that monogamy is the preferred alternative; it reads:

> You will never be able to deal equitably
> With all your wives, however much you may want.

Then there is the question of family planning, on which much of our progress depends; it cannot be denied that

Muslims have not taken to it as seriously as Hindus; this has to be corrected. There must be a vigorous campaign for its implementation among Muslims and their leaders in every sector must engage themselves to persuade them to adopt it so that they do not lag behind Hindus in fulfilling this most urgent task, without which India cannot succeed in eradicating poverty. There is, however, no truth in the allegation that Islam prohibits family planning. Many educated and secular-minded Hindus also hold this view. It is widely believed that Islam does not permit its followers even to adopt contraceptive methods. There is no basis for it in the Quran; most Muslim countries have adopted it and all heads of Muslim countries have subscribed to the UN Declaration endorsing it. Even Al-Azhar, the highest centre of Islamic theology has given a fatwa in its favour. Imam Ghazali (1058-1111), whom Muslims hold in the highest esteem and revere him as "the rejuvenator of the faith", has commended birth control under certain circumstances.

The rage of the communal Hindus against the Muslims, however politically motivated, can be overcome by the Muslims if they make a sustained effort effort to convince them that they should have no fear of them and assure them that they harbour no enemity towards them nor are they in a secret conspiracy with Muslims elsewhere to harm them. They are as much the sons of the soil as Hindus and as committed to its glory and prosperity as Hindus are. The misdeeds of some of the Muslim rulers in the past and a few of the self-appointed

Muslim leaders in the present should not blind Hindus to the fact that their ties with Muslims are old and strong and cannot be broken, whatever be the odds. As Sardar Patel said, just as the waters of the rivers can not be separated so also Hindus and Muslims. There is much more common between the two communities than the differences that are talked about. In recent years the negative part of their relationship has been focussed due to certain unfortunate incidents; these have been exploited to foment the rage among the communal Hindus against the Muslims.

The best way to overcome it is for the two of them to know each other better, to appreciate the true facets of their relationship and to remove the causes that have brought about the alienation. Once the goodwill, mutual trust and confidence are restored, they will be able to bring to the fore the wealth of their many-splendoured collaboration in every field, which spreads over a thousand years. That is the crying need of our times; India demands of both Hindus and Muslims to work for accord and not discord. Ben Jonson said: "All accord is born of contraries", while the Pope said: "All discord is born of harmony not understood". India contains the second largest Muslim population in the world; it cannot be wished away. It is an integral part of the nation. And a nation, as Lincoln told the Americans on the eve of the civil war, which is divided against itself, cannot stand.

These words of wisdom should awaken both the communities to the urgent need of rebuilding India, as a united,

strong and prosperous nation, so that it ensures stability and security for the people; for this a realistic understanding of each others' needs and difficulties has to be sincerely fostered; Hindus and Muslims must realize that hate will only corrode their energies and weaken national strength. Allama Iqbal, who gave us in the days when nationalist fervour had gripped him, the soul-stirring and immortal anthem: *Saare Jehaan say achaha Hindustan Hamaaraa*, had also written another famous poem at the same time called *Naya shawala*, the new shrine. Through its evocative words he called upon Hindus and Muslims to erect a new temple of unity; it was to outshine all other shrines. Such a temple is needed today more than ever before. The poet sang in Urdu and I translate it here:

If you don't mind, oh Brahmin
I must tell the truth —
These idols in your temples
These idols have grown old.
They teach you to hate your kith and kin
So does the Mullah, climb the pulpit
And preach aggression and war.
In disgust, I have shut my ears
To the chants and the calls
From both, the temple and the mosque.
In stone, oh Brahmin, you seek God
I see Him in the dust of my motherland.

Let the temple bells mingle with the muezzin's call,
Let us erase every trace of alienation
And break the barriers of separation.
Let us build a new temple of unity,
The grandest, whose spears will reach the sky;
Let the devotees drink the elixir of unity
And sing the song binding the bonds of harmony
For human liberation lies in love and compassion.

There must be a real awareness among Indian Muslims that they have to gird up their loins and prepare for reconciliation with Hindus on the basis that each respects the religious and cultural conventions, traditions and sentiments of the other. It has to be, as Gandhiji used to say, a true "union of hearts". An Urdu poet has cautioned:

Safeena choor, saahil door,
bebus naakhuda leikin
Saaharey sau gaye
tau be-saaharey tum na sau jao

The boat is battered
The shores far, far away,
The captain has given up hope
But you cannot go into slumber.
Awake, whatever the odds
And row on, undaunted
Until you reach the shores.

What Indian Muslims have to understand is that eventually it is not their leaders but they themselves who will have to make their destiny. Even during the days of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who was triumphantly going ahead on the path of transformation and rejuvenation of his co-religionists, the popular Urdu poet Akbar Allahabadi, known for his wit and wisdom, was impatient and unhappy with the response of the community. He therefore appealed to them in these words:

Aik Sayyid kya karey or baith kar dus kya karein?
Hazrat-e-Hali key ashaar-e-Mussaddus kya karein?
Dar haqueekat meharbaani quom ki durkaar hai
Hum akailey, bekuso zaar-o-beybus, kya karein

What can one Sayyid — or even ten put together do?
What can even the inspiring verse of Hali fulfil?
Truly, it is the community which must respond and act;
People like us — forlorn and helpless —
What can we alone do?

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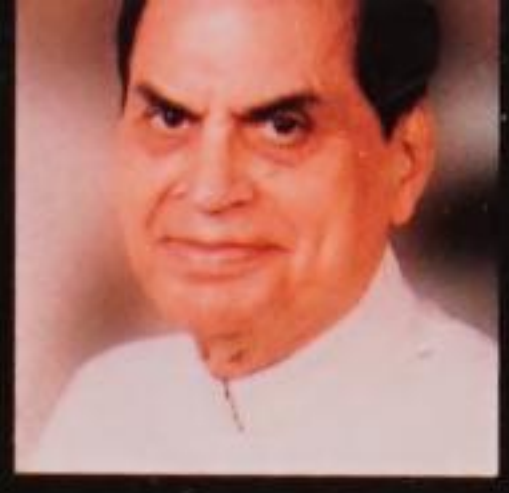

Dr. Rafiq Zakaria has had a distinguished career in fields as varied as law, education, journalism, politics and Islamic studies. He is Chancellor's gold medallist of the Bombay University and Ph.D. with distinction from London University.
He was called to the Bar from Lincoln's Inn. From his student days he was active in the freedom struggle, both at home and abroad. After a successful legal career he was elected to the state legislature of Maharashtra. From 1962 he served as cabinet minister in the state government for 15 years.
In 1978 he was elected to Parliament and became deputy leader of the ruling Congress Party in Parliament when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was its leader. He was given various important assignments including that of Prime Minister's Special Envoy to the Muslim world in 1984.
He has thrice represented India at the U.N. in 1965, 1990 and 1996.

Dr. Zakaria is a scholar of international repute. He is the author of over 15 books, including *A Study of Nehru*. His rejoinder to Salman Rushdie, entitled *Muhammad and the Quran*, published by Penguin International, has become a world classic. He has written several other books on the history and jurisprudence of Islam which have been universally acclaimed.
An eminent educationist, he has founded more than a dozen educational institutions of higher learning in Mumbai and Aurangabad. He was, for a quarter century, Chancellor of Jamia Urdu of Aligarh. He has chaired several important Government of India committees.
He has been passionately involved in Hindu-Muslim unity and has delivered prestigious memorial lectures at various universities on its different aspects.

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Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's comments on the author's book *Discovery of God* are as relevant to the basic issue of inter-religious relations raised by Dr. Rafiq Zakaria in this book.

प्रधान मंत्री
Prime Minister

New Delhi
July 17, 2000

Dear Dr. Zakaria,

I am happy to know that your latest book ***Discovery of God*** is being released in Mumbai today. I thank you for sending me a pre-release copy. I enjoyed leafing through its pages and hope to read it leisurely. I admire the wealth of information and knowledge that you have organized in the book. It also made me wonder how you, who have led a long and active political life, could still find time and energy to write a string of scholarly books, to which ***Discovery of God*** is a worthy addition.

The subject you have chosen is as old as the birth of man on earth. Its scope is encyclopedic. Yet, you have succeeded in presenting it in a fresh, simple and highly persuasive manner, with the power of your central thought that GOD IS ONE. This monotheistic thought is the defining principle of India's age-old civilization. Our ancient sages articulated it in these words: ***Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti*** (The Truth is One, wise men describe it differently). They also taught us the secular canon, which is the basis of our nationhood: ***Sarva Panth Samabhaava*** (Equal respect for all faiths). Claims of superiority or exclusivity in the interpretation of the Ultimate Truth are, therefore, alien to our culture, and so are intolerance, sectarianism and violence in the name of religion.

Because of India's innate belief in this principle, all religions of the world have found an honoured place in our soil. Each of them has enriched India's national heritage, which celebrates diversity and, yet, constantly reminds us of our essential unity. On a broader plane, this ideal of unity in diversity is also the sustaining principle for the entire human race. In the age of globalisation, our world needs mutual understanding and tolerance more than at any time in the past. Your book has reinforced my belief in this thought.

Please accept my heartiest congratulations for your scholarly accomplishment. I also send my appreciation to Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, for the excellent quality of printing and illustrations, which have greatly enhanced the force of the book's profound message.

Yours sincerely,

(Atal Bihari Vajpayee)

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